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Ryots face tear gas, cannons as they close in on Delhi

60 'Delhi Chalo' protesters were hurt as cops used force in Punjab

CHANDIGARH/NEW DELHI, 13 FEB

Farmers from Punjab clashed with Haryana Police at two border points between the states on Tuesday, facing tear gas dropped from drones and water cannons as they tried to break past barricades blocking their protest march to the national capital.

Twenty-four police personnel, including a deputy superintendent of police, were injured as protesters hurled stones at them, officials said. Farmer leaders said police also fired rubber bullets, and claimed over 60 protesters were hurt in the "attack" on them at Shambhu border, close to Haryana's Ambala city.

Police used tear gas and water cannons against the protesters at the border in state's Jind district as well. According to police, nine of their men suffered injuries in this clash at Data Singhwala-Khanauri border.

In the evening, after a face-off with police that lasted several hours, farmer leaders called off the protest for the day. They said they would resume the march from Shambhu on Wednesday.

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha are spearheading the Delhi Chalo' agitation to put pressure on the Centre for their demands, including a law on minimum support price for crops and loan waivers.

Union Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda, however, said a law guaranteeing MSP cannot be brought in a hurry without consulting all stakeholders.

The Punjab and Haryana High court Tuesday issued notices to the Centre and the states of Haryana and Punjab, on two separate petitions linked to the march. One of the petitioners sought directions from the court to stay all "obstructive" actions by the two state governments and the Centre. The other pleaded for directions to ensure no highway is blocked by the protesters.

A large group of farmers, including women, packed in tractor-trolleys left about 10 am Tuesday from Punjab's Fatehgarh Sahib, about 40 km from the border with BJP-ruled Haryana. An excavator was a part of one convoy, with a farmer in Amritsar saying it would be used to break barricades. Police barriers have been put up at several places in Haryana on the highway to Delhi. And at major entry points to the capital, the Delhi Police has installed layers of similar barriers that include barbed wire, concrete slabs and tyre-bursting strips on the road. The "fortification" of Delhi reminded many of the farmers' agitation for the repeal of the Centre's agri-marketing laws in 2021. *—PTI*

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Police use tear gas to disperse farmers gathered at the Punjab-Haryana Shambhu border during their 'Delhi Chalo' march, in Patiala district, Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

If farmers are aggressive, we need not be defensive: Police

As the Delhi Police prepares to stop protesting farmers from entering the national capital, a senior officer directed that they "need not be defensive" if the agitators show aggression. Special Commissioner of Police (Law and Order) Ravindra Yadav forces there that if the farmers manage to enter Delhi "our whole operation will fail". "If they are coming aggressively, we have to show more aggression." he said. *—PTI*

The farmers have renewed their years-long MSP and other demands. Here are a few:

- Enact a law guaranteeing MSP for all crops
- Provide complete debt waiver to farmers & labourers
- Reintroduce the land acquisition act of 2013 nationwide
- Punish Lakhimpur Kheri massacre accused and provide justice affected farmers
- Withdraw from the WTO and impose a ban on all free trade agreements
- Provide pension to farmers and farm labourers
- Compensate families of farmers who died during the Delhi agitation and offer job to 1 family member
- Scrap the Electricity Amendment Bill 2020
- Provide 200 days of employment/ year and daily wage of ₹700 under MGNREGA
- Impose penalties on companies producing fake pesticides, seeds and fertilisers
- Form national commission for spices
- Ensure right of indigenous people over water, forests and land, stopping companies from plundering tribal land

AAP to contest 6 seats in Delhi, offer 1 to Congress

NEW DELHI, 13 FEB

The AAP on Tuesday said it wants to contest six seats in Delhi in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls and offer just one to the Congress, asking the senior INDIA bloc ally to conclude seat-sharing talks at the earliest. The party also announced its candidates for two Lok Sabha seats in Gujarat and one in Goa. Addressing a press conference here after a meeting of the party's Political Affairs Committee (PAC), AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sandeep Pathak said Venzy Viegas will contest from the South Goa seat, while Chaitar Vasava and Umesh Bhai Makwana from Bharuch and Bhavnagar seats in Gujarat respectively. He said the AAP has demanded eight Lok seats in Gujarat (total 26) from the INDIA bloc which is proportionate to the party's vote share in the last assembly poll. *—PTI*

Sonia to contest RS poll from Rajasthan, says source

NEW DELHI/JAIPUR, 13 FEB

Former Congress president Sonia Gandhi will file her nomination from Rajasthan for the upcoming Rajya Sabha polls, party sources said on Tuesday. The sources said she will be travelling to Jaipur and party President Mallikarjun Kharge and her daughter Priyanka Gandhi Vadra are likely to accompany her for the filing of nomination papers. Sonia, who represented Rae Bareli in Lok Sabha, will not contest the next general election. "She is likely to file nomination for Rajya Sabha on Wednesday," a source said. The last date for filing nominations is 15 February and elections will be held on 27 February. Congress will win Rajya Sabha seats from Karnataka, Telangana, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. *—PTI*

IAF trainer aircraft crashes in Bengal; pilots eject safely

KOLKATA, 13 FEB

A Hawk trainer aircraft of the Indian Air Force (IAF) crashed on Tuesday at Kalaikunda in West Bengal's Paschim Medinipur district, a Defence official said. Both the pilots ejected safely, the official said, adding that a court of inquiry was instituted to find out the cause of the accident. The plane crashed in a civilian area near the Kalaikunda Air Force Station between 4 pm and 5 pm while returning from a training sortie. The official said there was no loss of life or damage to civilian property in the accident. The plane had taken off from Air Force Station Kalaikunda, which is mainly used as a training base. *—PTI*

Manipur to 'deport' citizens who came after 1961: Biren

IMPHAL, 13 FEB

A day after Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh said those who entered and settled in the state after 1961 would be identified and deported, experts on Tuesday raised doubts over viability of the move.

They said the identification of illegal immigrants was a "welcome step" but their deportation would be difficult unless the foreign countries concerned recognise them as their bonafide citizens.

The northeastern state has been rocked by ethnic strife since May last year which has killed more than 180 people since then, and the government has accused a section of immigrants from neighbouring Myanmar of fomenting trouble.

The Chief Minister's assertion comes after the Manipur cabinet had, in June 2022, approved a proposal to adopt 1961 as the base year for determining the "native status" of residents of the state for effective implementation of the inner line permit.

"In order to deport illegal immigrants, the foreign country concerned must accept them as their bonafide citizens. If the foreign country does not recognise the immigrants as their citizens, how will they be deported? Legal implications that need to be considered" Pradip Phanjoubam, a political analyst said.

A Manipur government official had, last year, said 2,187 people were staying in the state after Myanmar's military ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi there in February. *—PTI*

N Biren Singh *PHOTO: PTI*

1 killed as groups engage in shootout

IMPHAL, 13 FEB

A 25-year-old village volunteer was killed and two others were injured in a gunfight between two warring communities in Manipur's Imphal East district on Tuesday, police said. The shootout took place at Pukhao Shantipur bordering Kangpokpi district, a senior officer said. The deceased Sagolsem Loya was taken to a private hospital in Imphal where he succumbed to his injuries, the officer said. Intermittent gunfights had been reported at Pukhao and surrounding hill areas since Sunday night. *—PTI*

HDK WILL NOT CONTEST LS POLLS: DEVE GOWDA

BENGALURU, 13 FEB

Former chief minister HD Kumaraswamy will not contest for the Lok Sabha election, said HD Devegowda on Tuesday.

Speaking about the JDS candidate from Mandya, Gowda said, "The JDS workers said that either I should contest or Kumaraswamy should contest or Nikhil should contest. But I made it clear I will not stand and Nikhil said he wants to work as a party worker. Kumaraswamy is the legislative leader of our party."

"Being the legislative leader he has to fight in and out of the assembly sessions. Hence, he never said he will contest for Lok Sabha polls and this is the reality, he will not contest," added Gowda.

The news about his candidature are rumors, said JDS Supremo.

The JDS and BJP formed an alliance last year for the upcoming polls. As the election is nearing, the speculations over Mandya candidature began. *—Salar News*

'SCRIPTING HISTORY'

Modi launches UPI, RuPay card in UAE

Narendra Modi with members of the Indian community upon his arrival at a hotel, in Abu Dhabi, UAE, Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

ABU DHABI, 13 FEB

Prime Minister Modi and UAE President Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan introduced the UPI RuPay card service in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday.

This will facilitate seamless cross-border transactions between the two countries. This follows the MoU on interlinking payment and messaging systems signed in July last year during the PM's visit to Abu Dhabi.

Hailing India and the UAE as "partners in progress", Modi said the ties between the two countries serve as a model for the world and they are scripting a new history in the third decade of the 21st century. Underscoring the ancient community and cultural ties between the two countries, Modi also spoke a few lines in Arabic, which he later translated as how both India and the UAE are scripting a better future on 'duniya ki kitaab' (the world's book) with 'waqt ki kalam' (the pen of time). *—PTI*

'K'TAKA HAS NOT GOTTEN OLD LOANS WORTH ₹10K CR'

Bengaluru, 13 Feb

The Comptroller & Auditor General (CAG) on Tuesday has found that the Karnataka government has not recovered old loans amounting to over Rs 10,000 crore given to various entities, including a number of its own departments or undertakings.

It said there are some loans pending since 1977.

The CAG report on Finance Accounts 2022-23 was tabled in the Assembly on Tuesday.

"In respect of old loans amounting to Rs 10,389.78 crore involving eight departments (21 loanee entities), recoveries of principal have not been effected during the past several years, which includes loans pending since the year 1977," the CAG said.

According to the CAG report, the 21 loanee entities have arrears of Rs 15,856 crore, which includes principal of Rs 9,380 crore. *—PTI*

SC refuses to stay new law on CEC and ECs

NEW DELHI, 13 FEB

The Supreme Court on Tuesday refused to stay the operation of the new law that provides for appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners by a panel which does not include the Chief Justice of India.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta issued notice to the Centre on a plea filed by an NGO, Association for Democratic Reforms, and listed the matter along with other pending petitions on the issue for hearing in April.

The plea challenged the constitutional validity of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023. Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for the NGO, submitted the law is contrary to the constitution bench judgement of the apex court which had directed the inclusion of the CJI in the panel mandated to pick the CEC and ECs. He said two election commissioners are about to superannuate, and if the operation of the law is not stayed, the plea will become infructuous. Bhushan, however, again urged the court to grant a stay, especially on Section 7 of the Act, by which the panel is constituted for appointment of the chief election commissioner and election commissioners, saying that the issue is importa *—PTI*

SURYA GHAR: MUFT BIJLI YOJANA

PM starts scheme to boost solar power

NEW DELHI, 13 FEB

In a bid to boost solar power and sustainable progress, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday announced that his government is launching the 'PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana' which aims to light up one crore households by providing up to 300 units of free electricity every month. Modi said the project would entail an investment of over Rs 75,000 crore.

"In order to further sustainable development and people's wellbeing, we are launching the PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana. This project, with an investment of over Rs 75,000 crore, aims to light up 1 crore households by providing up to 300 units of free electricity every month," the prime minister said on X.

From substantive subsidies, which will be given directly to people's bank accounts, to heavily concessional bank loans, the central government will ensure that there is no cost burden on the people, he said.

All stakeholders will be integrated to a National Online Portal, the prime minister added.

Modi said that in order to popularise this scheme at the grassroots, urban local bodies and panchayats shall be incentivised to promote rooftop solar systems in their jurisdictions.

"At the same time, the scheme will lead to more income, lesser power bills and employment generation for people," the Prime Minister said. *—PTI*

Modi said the project would entail an investment of over ₹75,000 crore *PHOTO: ANI*

PRR project to be economic corridor: DKS

BENGALURU, 13 FEB

Long-stalled Peripheral Ring Road (PRR) project will be converted into an economic corridor, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said in Assembly on Tuesday. The corridor will cost around Rs 24,000 crore and cover 2,596 acres, primarily private land.

"It has been 15 years since the project was proposed. Previous governments tried to start this project, but they failed as no one came forward to bid for the tender. So now the plan is being changed and it will be rolled out in the PPP model and the tender has been called," Shivakumar said. Even though there are court orders regarding land compensation, Shivakumar said: "We will discuss this issue in the Cabinet and help the farmers. I have assured the farmers that we will not de-notify this land again and we will implement the project." He said they will complete the Yettinahole Project at the earliest and talks will be held to address water scarcity in Tumakuru. About realty developers not transferring land rights to apartment owners, Shivakumar said some are not doing this despite a law in place. Because of this "we are conducting a survey of all properties in Bengaluru. Once the survey is done, let us bring a law to ensure that apartment residents' association becomes the owner," he said. *—Salar News*

SDPI worker arrested for defamatory posts against Varanasi judge

RAMANAGARA, 13 FEB

In a swift response to a derogatory social media post targeting a Varanasi district court judge, the police apprehended Chand Pasha, an activist associated with Social Democratic Party of India on Tuesday. The controversial post by Pasha made on Facebook denigrated the judge for his recent ruling regarding worship activities in the basement of Gyanvapi Mosque in Uttar Pradesh. Pasha's inflammatory remarks questioned the timing of the judicial decision made just a day before the judge's retirement. Pasha called the judge a sychophant of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. The post prompted swift action from BJP, which lodged a police complaint. Lawyers in Ramanagara staged a protest, halting court proceedings. The post was later deleted. *—Salar News*

College student killed after bull hits him during race

SHIVAMOGGA, 13 FEB

A 19-year-old college student in Karnataka's Shivamogga district was killed after he was hit by a bull during a race at Kalmane, on Tuesday. Puneeth Achar, a student from a private college in Shikaripura, went to Kalmane to watch the bull race. Puneeth hails from Hosa Malali village in Nyamathi taluk of Davangere district. During the race, Achar was hit by the bull, leading to grievous injuries. He was rushed to a nearby hospital for treatment. He was declared dead by the doctors on arrival.*—PTI*

Teacher arrested for abetting suicide of student in Mangaluru

MANGALURU, 13 FEB

A teacher of a private school at Belthangady in Dakshina Kannada district has been arrested for allegedly abetting the suicide of a girl student on Tuesday.The teacher sent a derogatory message about the student to one of her classmates, which led the girl to take the extreme step. The girl, a resident of Pijathadka in Dharmasthala, who was in a critical condition after she allegedly attempted suicide by consuming poison, died at a hospital in Bengaluru on Monday. She was admitted to a hospital in Mangaluru on 7 February and was later shifted to Victoria hospital in Bengaluru on 11 February for advanced treatment.The drawing teacher was arrested on Monday by police for abetting the suicide as the girl reportedly took the extreme step due to humiliation. Dharmasthala police have registered a case and investigations are on, police said.*—PTI*

Cops seize tobacco products worth ₹1.45 cr, 9 arrested

BENGALURU, 13 FEB

City police recovered Rs 1.45 crore worth of banned tobacco products and arrested nine people from Chamarajpet, Mahadevapura, and Ramamurthy Nagar. The police seized tobacco products named Afzal and Dilbagh that have been banned under the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (COTPA) Act. These products are commonly used in banned hookah bars. The government banned the hookah bars in the State on 7 February. The police confiscated 11 mobile phones, Rs 1.1 lakh in cash, silver coins, and a vehicle. In another case, City police arrested one person in illegal refilling and sale of LPG cylinders. Central Crime Branch (CCB) raided a warehouse in Soladevanahalli, and seized 110 cylinders worth Rs 8lakhs.The accused used unauthorised cylinder rods and unauthorised labels from brands such as Bharat Gas and Indane Gas. *—Salar News*

State tables Bill mandating 60% Kannada text on signages

The statement said Kannada shall be displayed in the upper half of the board

BENGALURU, 13 FEB

A Bill mandating 60 per cent Kannada text in signboards of businesses and establishments was tabled in Legislative Assembly on Tuesday.

The Kannada Language Comprehensive Development (Amendment) Bill, 2024, amends the 2022 Act.

The amendment is to ensure that the name boards of commercial, industrial and business undertakings, trusts, counseling centres, hospitals, laboratories, amusement centres and hotels, among others display 60 per cent in Kannada language.

Kannada shall be displayed in the upper half of the name board, the bill in its statement of objects and reasons said.

The Bill also amends the Act to appoint the Director, Directorate of Kannada and Culture as the Member, and the Secretary, Kannada Development Authority to be the Convener of the 'State Level Committee' that will act as an enforcement authority for implementing the official language.

Cabinet on 5 January gave its approval to an ordinance to amend the Kannada Language Comprehensive Development Act that mandates 60 per cent use of the language in signages. As of now, the law requires the use of Kannada language in the upper half of signboards, displaying the names of businesses.

Along with the Bill, the Assembly during the Budget session discussed various irrigation projects.BangarapetMLA SN Narayanaswamy said lakes in his district are barren. He requested Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar to begin II Phase II of Koramangala-ChallaghattaValley Project (KC Valley) which will benefit 134 lakes in Kolar and Chikkaballapur.

MLAs also complained that the roads leading to the Upper Bhadra project are destroyed causing many accidents. Shivakumar said the government is trying to complete the project but Rs 5,400 crore expected from the Centre is yet to arrive.

Sakleshpur MLA Cement Manju also slammed the government for supplying water only for 16,000 acres of land instead of the promised 37,000 acres

During the question hour, BJP leaders targeted Labour Minister Santosh Lad over rules for obtaining labour cards. The card requires construction workers to submit building plans, but some leaders said it does not make sense. Lad defended the rule, saying that a large percentage of current labour card holders are bogus and do not know where the buildings they have worked on are located.

Over increasing deaths due to alcohol related ailments, Dodaballapura MLA Dheeraj Muniraju urges action against home-based liquor sales in rural areas. He suggests booking bars that sell over 2.5 litres of alcohol to one person and shutting them down after three such cases.The House also saw Leader of Opposition R Ashoka and Home Minister G Parameshwaraspar over "goonda rajya" in State. Ashoka alleged that the rise in rapes cases are due to "goonda rajya". Parameshwara hit back saying the law and order is better now compared to BJP's tenure.

Congress MLA Ravikumar Ganigaasked the government to ban cricket betting and rummy in State.

—Salar News

A Bill mandating 60 per cent Kannada text in signboards of businesses and establishments was tabled in Legislative Assembly on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

BJP MLA SLAMS CENTRE OVER ANNA BHAGYA RICE

BENGALURU, 13 FEB

BJP MLA Narendraswamy criticised the Centre for denying the provision of rice to the State under the Anna Bhagya scheme. Swamy accused BJP of not helping the poor by not providing rice despite State being ready to pay Rs 34 per kg for it. He further added that the Centre is now selling the same rice under the brand name "Bharat" for Rs 29. He also defended the speech made by Governor Thawar Chand Gehlot during the Assembly's commencement.

1.5L TONNES COPRA REMAINS UNSOLD: REVANNA

BENGALURU, 13 FEB

Hassan JD(S) MLA HD Revanna has claimed that 1.5 lakh metric tonnes of copra has remained unsold in nine coconut-growing districts. Revanna said Congress leader DK Shivakumar had promised to purchase the dry coconut by paying Rs 15,000 as support price. Now, the Union government has set Rs 12,000 as support price. Revanna urged either Central or state government to purchase the dry coconut and save the coconut growers. *—Salar News*

BJP TARGETS CONG OVER CM SKIPPING SESSION

BENGALURU, 13 FEB

Opposition BJP and JD(S) targeted Congress over the absence of Ministers including Chief Minister Siddaramaiah during the session. Deputy Chief Minister Shivakumar defended the absence by saying everybody was at the inauguration of Basavanna's portrait."Speaker held the Assembly early. He has changed the timings," said Shivakumar. *—Salar News*

20% OF B'LURU DEPENDS ON WATER TANKERS, SAYS DKS

BENGALURU, 13 FEB

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar said that almost 20 per cent of Bengaluru got water from tankers, highlighting concerns of rising water scarcity in the state. Shivakumar, who is also Bengaluru Development Minister, swas responding to MLA CK Ramamurthy's query over not supplying Cauvery water to 13 slums in Jayanagar.Ramamurthy claimed BWSSB is demanding Rs 4 crore to supply Cauvery water because of which 5,000 houses are dependent on borewells for their needs. Shivakumar said the problem exists in the entire City.

CAUVERY WATER DISPUTE

Farmers in Mandya hold massive protest

MANDYA, 13 FEB

The fervent struggle for Cauvery water rights reignites in Mandya as farmers and activists launch a renewed protest against the diversion of water resources to Tamil Nadu.

The District Farmers Welfare Committee orchestrates a massive protest near the Visvesvaraya statue, denouncing the recent order to release 908 cusecs of water to Tamil Nadu by the authorities. In September, farmers and students alike took to the streets in a monumental demonstration against the release of Cauvery water to the neighbouring state. The sit-in protest, initiated at that time, has persisted, symbolising the steadfast resolve of the local community to safeguard their water rights.

The District Farmers Welfare Committee spearheads a 'weekly movement' aimed at intensifying opposition to the Central Water Commission and Cauvery Water Management Authority directives. The movement marks the culmination of the 150-day-long Kaveri dharani (sit-in protest), signalling a new phase of resistance against perceived injustices in water distribution.

With a display of solidarity, the Farmers' Welfare Committee joins the chorus of dissent, echoing the sentiments of frustration and anger prevalent among the local populace. A poignant symbol of their discontent, posters condemning the inequitable distribution of Cauvery water adorn public spaces, serving as a visual reminder of the ongoing struggle for water sovereignty. The 'weekly movement' represents a collective outcry against what many perceive as a betrayal of the state's interests in the management of Cauvery water resources. As the protests gain momentum, organisers vow to escalate their efforts to ensure that the voices of Mandya's farmers are heard and their concerns addressed. *—Salar News*

Lokayukta registers DA case against DKS

BENGALURU, 13 FEB

Karnataka Lokayukta police have registered a case against Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar anticipating a transfer of a disproportionate assets probe to itself from CBI.

Karnataka cabinet in November 2023, withdrew the previous BJP government's decision to accord sanction to Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to prosecute Shivakumar, who is also Congress State unit President. Reacting to FIR, DK Shivakumar said, "CBI was giving hundreds of notices to all the institutions I am affiliated with, my friends and family. Now the case has been transferred to Lokayuktha. I have not done anything wrong and I will fight this legally." Lokayukta police are anticipating the transfer of the case from CBI, but acknowledged that State Government's order of withdrawing sanction has been disputed by CBI in Karnataka High Court.

There is no bar as of now on Lokayukta to investigate the case as court has not put any restrictions.

"Without CBI transferring the case documents, there isn't much we can do right now except some basic investigation. For some meaningful investigation to happen, we are waiting for High Court order and we will act as per its directions," an officer said. *—PTI*

Kolar: Cong workers exchange blows

KOLAR, 13 FEB

Two factions of Congress workers exchanged blows during a booth-level agents' meeting held in Kolar on Tuesday in the presence of KPCC General Secretary Rajkumar and former MLC Ramesh who had come as observers.

Supporters of Food & Civil Supplies Minister KH Muniyappa and Kolar Congress MLA Kottur Manjunath exchanged blows and District Congress Working President Urubagilu Srinivas sustained a minor injury on his head as one supporter of Manjunath hit Srinivas on his face.

As soon as the meeting began in the morning, supporters of Manjunath raised objections over a flex put up in which the picture of him was missing and they alleged that some leaders openly worked for the JD(S) during the last Assembly elections. The supporters of Muniyappa countered the claims and it was a free-for-all after this.

Srinivas, who was hospitalised after sustaining injuries, said he has not lodged any complaint with the police and it is up to the party leadership to take suitable action against those responsible for Tuesday's incident.

Some leaders of Congress came together under the leadership of former speaker KR Ramesh Kumar to defeat seven-time MP from Kolar KH Muniyappa in the last Lok Sabha elections.

—Salar News

PWD clears ₹600 cr bills of contractors

BENGALURU, 13 FEB

The bills of 1,054 small contractors in the State estimated at Rs 600 crore in total have been cleared by Public Works Department (PWD) without taking any bribe, said State Contractors' Association President D Kempanna on Tuesday.

"The bills under Rs 1 crore have been cleared by PWD and other departments should also start releasing funds like PWD. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar are cooperating with us," Kempanna said. Shivakumar has promised to release the pending bills of Bruhat Bengaluru MahanagaraPalike in another year, he added.

Kempanna claimed that corruption is taking place because of the package system (dividing contracts into different sections and allotting them to various contractors). "We are demanding that the package system should be abolished," the association president said. Kempanna last week claimed that the 40 per cent commission tradition is continuing under the Congress regime as well. He had said during BJP's tenure, the MLAs were taking bribes but now the officials are taking bribes. *—Salar News*

Concerns mount as monkey fever surges in K'taka district

SHIVAMOGGA, 13 FEB

The spectre of Kyasanur forest disease (KFD) also called monkey fever disease looms large over the hilly terrains of Karnataka, sparking apprehension among villagers as the number of reported cases continues to rise.

At least six people have fallen prey to the disease in Thirthahalli town. According to District Medical Officer Rajesh Suragihalli, all patients currently are undergoing treatment at the taluk hospital. During his visit to the hospital, he assured that adequate medical provisions have been made to address the situation, urging residents to remain resolute in the face of adversity. *—Salar News*

Tense situation prevails in Ramanagara

BENGALURU, 13 FEB

A defamatory post on social media allegedly made by Chand Pasha, an advocate and a worker of Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI), against a judge in Gyanvapi mosque case in Varanasi, has resulted in protests and legal actions in Ramnagara.

Pasha was arrested and charges were filed against his 40 associates based on a complaint by senior advocate BM Srinivasa against the post. The Advocates Association convened a meeting to discuss action against Pasha, but a group of individuals allegedly pressured them not to take any action, creating a tense atmosphere on the court premises on Tuesday. Earlier the police registered another FIR against 40 advocates based on a complaint by Rafiq Khan, who alleged assault and abuse by the advocates when he attempted to submit a memorandum against Pasha. A delegation led by HL Vishal Raghu, Chairman of Karnataka Bar Council, submitted a memorandum to SP Karthik Reddy regarding the incident. Raghu demanded the suspension of Sub-Inspector Tanveer Hussain, who lodged what is claimed to be a false complaint against the advocates. *—Salar News*

RS 15,000 MONTHLY HONORARIUM

ASHA workers demand fixed pay

BENGALURU, 13 FEB

Hundreds of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) workers in State descended upon Bengaluru's Freedom Park on Tuesday, demanding the delinking of the Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) web portal from the payroll process and a fixed monthly honorarium of Rs 15,000.

Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao, who came to the protest site, assured ASHA workers that they will get Rs 7,000 (existing Rs 5,000 in honorarium and Rs 2,000 for non-Mother and Child Tracking System services) every month directly. The minister also said the issues in the portal will be fixed within six months and if not, they will get a team Incentive of Rs 1,000 per month. But the workers said they will continue the protest on Wednesday also. The RCH portal serves as the central data entry system for ASHA workers, where they upload details of their services. Based on this data, the Union government releases their monthly incentives. However, persistent technical issues with the portal have led to "absolute non-payment and irregular deposition" of wages, according to the All-India United Trade Union Centre. The ASHA workers demanded immediate solutions to issues plaguing the portal and demanded a fixed monthly wage, eliminating the need for data entry.

Savithri Devi, an ASHA worker from Bengaluru, told Salar News "We have to struggle to make ends meet in our workplace, and a mere Rs 5,000 per month is not enough for that. We need more than that to survive in this City."

Beyond technical woes, ASHA workers express concerns about their workload. *—Salar News*

Members of Karnataka Rajya Samyuktha ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

PETA India launches campaign in B'luru

BENGALURU, 13 FEB

On Valentine's Day, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India launched a unique campaign in Bengaluru to promote veganism. Dressed as "Valentine angels" in red gowns and wings, PETA members will distribute red roses and vegan ice cream scoops to passers-by at the World War Memorial on Brigade Road. The aim of the campaign, titled "Have a heart: try vegan," is to encourage people to show compassion for animals by adopting a vegan lifestyle. The "angels" will hold distribute leaflets.*—Salar News*

PETA volunteers hold placard to encourage people to go vegan in Bengaluru on Tuesday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

ED seizes Rs 31 lakh cash during searches in Karnataka, Andhra

NEW DELHI, 13 FEB

Enforcement Directorate (ED) has seized "unaccounted" cash worth Rs 31 lakh during searches at multiple locations in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh in connection with a money laundering case. The case under provisions of Prevention of Money Laundering Ac, 2002, was registered against two people, Surya Narayana Reddy and Bharath Reddy. It stems from an FIR registered in Karnataka's Bellary and the searches were carried out on 10 February. The agency found "incriminating evidence" indicating that Bharath Reddy allegedly mobilised approximately Rs 42 crore cash over a few months just before assembly elections and utilised the funds for "unlawful transactions". *—PTI*

Farooq informs ED he is not in Srinagar

NEW DELHI, 13 FEB

Summoned by Enforcement Directorate in a money laundering case, National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah has informed the agency he will not appear before it on Tuesday as he is out of town. They said Lok Sabha member from Srinagar has communicated it to ED officials through "an email and a letter". He was asked to depose at ED office in Srinagar on Tuesday, but sources said he is currently in Jammu. The 86-year-old politician was last called by central agency in this case on 11 January but he did not appear then as well. ED investigation pertains to alleged financial irregularities at Jammu and Kashmir Cricket Association. The case relates to alleged siphoning off JKCA funds by transferring to various personal bank accounts of unrelated parties, including those of JKCA office-bearers, and unexplained cash withdrawals from its bank accounts. *—PTI*

JD (U) MLA lodges FIR against party colleague

PATNA, 13 FEB

An FIR has been lodged by an MLA of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's JD(U) against a party colleague, alleging that he was offered a bribe of Rs 10 crore and a ministerial berth for switching over to RJD-led 'Mahagathbandhan' ahead of the trust vote. The case was lodged at Kotwali police station by Sudhanshu Shekhar, who represents the Harlakhi seat of Madhubani district on 11 February. The new NDA government headed by Kumar won the trust vote on Monday. However, Deputy SP said the JD (U) MLA has accused a party colleague of offering him the princely amount, or settle for a cabinet berth in the new government, for helping the opposition grouping turn the tables on BJP-led coalition. The complainant has also accused another JD (U) MLA of trying to kidnap two other legislators of the party with a view to preventing them from taking part in the trust vote. All aspects of the case are being looked into. *—PTI*

Months after ED arrest, Senthil Balaji quits as minister

CHENNAI, 13 FEB

After remaining as a minister without portfolio for months following his arrest by Enforcement Directorate, V Senthil Balaji has quit MK Stalin-led state Cabinet. A Raj Bhavan release said Governor RN Ravi, who had earlier opposed the continuance of Balaji in Cabinet, has accepted Stalin's recommendation in this connection. Based on a letter from CM dated 12 February, recommending acceptance of the resignation of jailed DMK leader, "Governor has approved the recommendation and accepted the resignation of Thiru V Senthil Balaji, Minister, from Council of Ministers," the release said. Balaji, a DMK strongman from Karur, was arrested on 14 June, 2023, by ED in a cash-for-jobs scam when he was Transport Minister in an earlier AIADMK regime. Two days after his arrest, the portfolios held by Balaji then,Electricity, Non-Conventional Energy Development Molasses were re-allocated in Stalin-led Cabinet. *—PTI*

Chavan's day at BJP headquarters goes wrong

MUMBAI, 13 FEB

Ashok Chavan, a Congress stalwart transitioning to BJP, committed a gaffe when he mistakenly referred to Mumbai BJP Chief Ashish Shelar as Congress's city unit president during his joining speech at saffron party's state headquarters on Tuesday. The room filled with laughter, before, Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis stepped in to rectify the error. Chavan, in a moment of chagrin, acknowledged the mistake, attributing it to his long-standing allegiance to Congress party. Regaining his composure, he remarked, "It's a slip of the tongue. This marks my inaugural day and I request you to excuse me," eliciting *—PTI*

Govt's stubborn approach to farmers is dangerous: Tikait

BKU chief wonders whether farmers will always be in the agitation mode

LUCKNOW, 13 FEB

Bharatiya Kisan Union President Naresh Tikait on Tuesday said the Centre should hold talks with the farmers and alleged that its "stubborn approach" is proving to be dangerous.

The BKU chief wondered whether the farmers will always be in the agitation mode, block roads or head towards Delhi.

On the proposed 16 February bandh call given by Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) and various other organisations, Tikait said school vans, vehicles carrying patients and military vehicles will be exempted. The problems should be resolved through talks, he added.

Asked to elaborate on the demands of the farmers, Tikait told PTI Videos in Muzaffarnagar, "The demands are different in different states. Will the farmers always be undertaking agitation, block roads or head towards Delhi?

"The government also has some (share) of responsibility. What is the problem in taking cognisance in these matters? The 'ziddi ravaiyya' (stubborn approach) is proving to be dangerous. The government should think (on these issues) and hold talks with the farmers," he said, and asserted that Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) is always with the farmers.On borders being sealed in Delhi, he said, "The point of farmers goes unheard. The point of the government goes unheard. " *—PTI*

Bharatiya Kisan Union President Naresh Tikait on Tuesday said the Centre should hold talks with the farmers *PHOTO: PTI*

> **Barbed wire, teargas from drones, nails and guns... everything is arranged. The dictatorial Modi government is trying to curb the voice of farmers**
>
> **-Mallikarjun Kharge,** Congress President

> **The Narendra Modi government has not only denied the rights of farmers and workers, but also betrayed them. Why do they (the Centre) say no to the law to guarantee minimum support price for crops?**
>
> **-Brinda Karat,** Senior CPI(M) leader

CONG PROMISED MSP IF IT COMES TO POWER

AMBIKAPUR, 13 FEB

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday promised to make Minimum Support Price (MSP) a legal right for farmers and implement Swaminathan report in toto if the India alliance is voted to power in 2024.

Gandhi along with Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge condemned the use of tear gas on farmers and their arrest for advocating for fair treatment, vowing legal safeguards for MSP if his party comes to power. He accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of utilising economic policies like GST and demonetisation to ruin small-scale entrepreneurs across the nation, a charge which has been denied time and again by BJP.

During his 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra', Gandhi also hinted at incorporating recommendations from the Swaminathan Committee into their election manifesto. *—PTI*

Traffic snarls in Delhi ahead of farmer's March

NEW DELHI, 13 FEB.

Traffic crawled at a snail's pace at many places in Delhi-National Capital Region on Tuesday. Police placed multiple layers of barricades and stopped the movement of vehicles at Singhu and Tikri borders to thwart farmers' march to the city. Commuters faced a harrowing time on the roads, battling massive traffic snarls with Delhi being put under a heavy security with personnel in anti-riot gear deployed and barricades regulating access to roads. *—PTI*

BIHAR'S BUDGET

Bihar Deputy CM and Finance Minister Samrat Chaudhary displays a folder-case containing State Budget 2024-25 papers, in Patna, on Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

Bihar govt presents budget; growth highest in country

PATNA, 13 FEB

Nitish Kumar government in Bihar on Tuesday tabled Rs 2.79 lakh crore budget, asserting that the state's finances were in "good shape" with the growth rate standing well above 10 per cent, "highest" in the country.

Presenting the budget before state assembly, Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary said it was a matter of pride for Bihar that its growth rate at "10.64 per cent" was also much higher than the national average.

"We are committed to the state's overall development. We succeeded in pulling out 2.5 crore people from the clutches of poverty in the current financial year", asserted Choudhary who holds the finance portfolio.He presented the budget amid a ruckus created by members of the opposition, who trooped into the well and later staged a walkout, shouting slogans like "palturam hosh mein aao (Mr Turncoat, come back to your senses)".

Notably, the budget was presented a day after Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who dumped RJD-helmed 'Mahagathbandhan' and returned to BJP-led NDA, won a trust vote.

State's budget estimate for the next fiscal was Rs 2, 78,725.72 crore, an increase of Rs 16,840 crore, compared with the current financial year.Out of the total expenditure, Rs one lakh crore was earmarked for "annual scheme outlay" with the largest share (22.20 per cent) reserved for the education department, followed by rural development (13.84 per cent).The estimated expenditure on health has been pegged at 7.41 per cent of the annual scheme outlay. *—PTI*

HC sets aside Sec 144 in West Bengal

KOLKATA, 13 FEB

Calcutta High Court on Tuesday set aside the promulgation of prohibitory orders under Section 144 of CrPC at Sandeshkhali, which has been witnessing protests over the last one week.

Meanwhile, National Commission for Scheduled Castes has taken suo motu cognisance of incidents in West Bengal's restive and asked the administration to submit an action taken report within three days. The report should be submitted with details of the incident, victims, accused, action taken and compensation given to the victims

A petition was filed by two residents of Sandeshkhali seeking a direction from the court for lifting the prohibitory orders in the area.

Justice Jay Sengupta set aside the promulgation of Section 144 of CrPC by district administration North 24 Parganas, holding that the manner in which it was done was not right.

Petitioner's counsel Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharya claimed that the foundation of promulgation of prohibitory orders in Sandeshkhali was not there and that it was done to curtail the rights of people to protest.The state opposed the prayer claiming that it has also to be seen whether there was sufficient ground for such protests and also that violence was allegedly perpetrated from some such agitations. Sandeshkhali has been in the headlines for protests by women who allege that local TMC leader Sheikh Shajahan and his "gang" captured swathes of land by force and also sexually harassed them.Shajahan has been absconding since last month after a team of Enforcement Directorate (ED) went to raid his house. *—PTI*

Plaint against Tejashwi quashed by SC

NEW DELHI, 13 FEB

Supreme Court quashed the defamation complaint against RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav over his alleged "only Guajarati's can be thugs" remark after he agreed to withdraw the statement, on Tuesday.

A bench of Justices AS Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan granted the relief to former Bihar deputy chief minister on his plea seeking to transfer the defamation trial to a court outside Gujarat.

The top court on 5 February had reserved its order on a plea filed by Yadav seeking transfer of the criminal defamation complaint pending against him in an Ahmedabad court over his remark to a place outside state, preferably Delhi.

The apex court on 29 January had directed Yadav to file a "proper statement" withdrawing his alleged remark.

Tejashwi Yadav *PHOTO: PTI*

- A bench of Justices AS Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan granted the relief to former Bihar deputy chief minister on his plea seeking to transfer the defamation trial to a court outside Gujarat

Yadav on 19 January filed an affidavit in the apex court withdrawing his alleged "Gujarati thugs" remark.

The top court, while hearing RJD leader's plea, had earlier stayed the proceedings in the criminal defamation complaint and issued notice to Gujarat resident who had filed it.

Gujarat court had in August conducted a preliminary inquiry against Yadav under section 202 of Code of Criminal Procedure and found sufficient grounds to summon him on the complaint filed by Haresh Mehta, a local businessman and activist.

According to the complaint, Yadav, while talking to media in Patna in March 2023, had said, "Only Guajarati's can be thugs in the present situation, and their fraud will be forgiven."

"Who will be responsible if they run away with the money belonging to LIC or banks?" said Yadav. Mehta claimed Yadav's comments defamed all Gujarat. *—PTI*

SP declares names for RS seats in UP

LUCKNOW, 13 FEB

Samajwadi Party (SP) on Tuesday nominated Ramjilal Suman, Jaya Bachchan and former IAS officer Alok Ranjan as its candidates for Rajya Sabha in Uttar Pradesh.

While actor-turned politician Jaya Bachchan has been nominated again for Rajya Sabha, this is the first time for Ranjan.

"Suman, Bachchan and Ranjan are SP candidates for Rajya Sabha.

They will be filing nominations today," SP spokesperson Rajendra Chaudhary said.

SP, by way of its increased strength in Uttar Pradesh assembly, from 47 in 2017 to 108 at present, is now in a position to send three members.

The party has 108 MLAs and INDIA bloc partner Congress has two MLAs.

A candidate needs 37 first preference votes to secure a seat in Rajya Sabha and therefore, SP would be able to send 3 members to Rajya Sabha.

Asked about the choice of the candidates fielded for Rajya Sabha elections, SP MLA Manoj Pandey said that Ramjilal Suman belongs to the PDA (Picchde, Dalit, Alpasankhyak), while Jaya Bachchan hails from a famous family of the country.

Elections for 56 Rajya Sabha seats spread across 15 states are scheduled to be held on 27 February, and the last date for filing nominations is 15 February.

The polling will be held on 27 February and the results will be announced on the same day. *—PTI*

Chavan joins BJP for start of 'new political life'

MUMBAI, 13 FEB

Former Maharashtra Chief Minister Ashok Chavan made his political move by joining the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Mumbai, just a day after parting ways with Congress, on Tuesday. Chavan, 65, was warmly welcomed into BJP fold at the party's Mumbai office in the presence of key figures, including Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis.

Regarding his new phase in his political career, Chavan, who spent nearly four decades in Congress, said today signifies the commencement of his fresh political journey.

Ashok Chavan with Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis addresses media after joining BJP, in Mumbai *PHOTO: PTI*

Son of former Maharashtra Chief Minister and Union Home Minister SB Chavan, his choice to align with BJP emerges amidst speculation that he might be given Rajya Sabha nomination.

Addressing concerns raised by Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut regarding the Adarsh scam,

- Ashok Chavan made his political move by joining the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Mumbai, just a day after parting ways with Congress

Chavan defended himself, stating, "Bombay High Court's decision favoured me. I view it as a political mishap. Although certain agencies have contested the court's ruling, I have endured enough and consider it a non-issue now."

Former Chief Minister and Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray has also raked up Adarsh housing scam to target Chavan and said on Monday that if BJP sends him to Rajya Sabha, it will amount to disrespecting martyred soldiers."It is true that Congress did a lot of things for me and gave me several opportunities, but nobody can deny that I have also done a lot for the party. It is unfair to be critical of me," Chavan said. On farmers' 'Delhi Chalo' march, Chavan said it was true that the cultivators were facing some issues. But their issues will be addressed for sure.

Government wants to stop farmers' suicides. Prime Minister is capable, and he can make other leaders, like the agriculture Minister, to find solutions. *—PTI*

SC extends stay on proceedings against Kejri

NEW DELHI, 13 FEB

Supreme Court extended its interim stay on proceedings against Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in a case lodged against him, on Tuesday.

He was alleged for objectionable remarks against BJP and Congress in Uttar Pradesh during 2014 Lok Sabha poll campaign.

Kejriwal has moved the apex court against an order of Lucknow bench of Allahabad High Court which had declined to discharge him in the criminal case pending before a trial court at Sultanpur.

A bench of Justices MM Sundresh and SVN Bhatti agreed to hear the appeal filed by Kejriwal."Let the interim order continue. What is all this? These are all irrelevant matters. It is not a matter for us to go into," the bench observed.

He had allegedly said on 2 May, 2014 during the campaign trail, "Jo Congress ko vote dega, mera manana hoga, desh ke saath gaddari hogi. Joh Bhajapa (BJP) ko vote dega use khuda bhi maaf nahin karega (Those who will vote for Congress will be betraying the nation, and god will not forgive those who will vote for BJP)."Kejriwal said this was done without any independent inquiry by police. *—PTI*

UP RS polls: SP renominates Jaya

LUCKNOW, 13 FEB

The Samajwadi Party (SP) on Tuesday renominated Jaya Bachchan to the Rajya Sabha, and announced the candidature of former MP Ramjilal Suman and retired IAS officer Alok Ranjan for the polls to the Upper House of Parliament from Uttar Pradesh.

They filed their nomination papers for the elections at the Uttar Pradesh assembly complex, where SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, Party General Secretary Shivpal Singh Yadav and other party leaders were present.

Returning Officer and Special Secretary of the Uttar Pradesh Assembly Braj Bhushan Dubey said that all three candidates have submitted their nomination papers in two sets each. The scrutiny of the papers will be held on 16 February from 11 am onwards, he said. Bachchan's fourth term as a Rajya Sabha member is ongoing and the actor-turned-politician has been renominated for a fifth term.Suman is a four-time MP from Firozabad. He became an MP in 1977 on a Janata Party ticket. *—PTI*

NCP ROW

Sharad Pawar moves SC challenging EC order

NEW DELHI, 13 FEB

Having lost control over the party he founded, veteran politician Sharad Pawar has moved the Supreme Court against the Election Commission order recognising the faction led by his estranged nephew Ajit Pawar as the real Nationalist Congress Party (NCP).

Sharad, who founded the NCP with former Lok Sabha speaker Purno Sangma and Tariq Anwar in 1999 after their expulsion from the Congress, filed the petition through lawyer Abhishek Jebaraj on Monday evening.

Before the Maratha stalwart approached the apex court, the Ajit faction had filed a caveat through advocate Abhikalp Pratap Singh to ensure that no ex-parte order is passed in favour of the Sharad group. In a body blow to Sharad, the Election Commission announced on 6 February that the Ajit Pawar faction is the real NCP. The poll panel also allotted the NCP's election symbol 'clock' to the group led by Ajit.

EC considers the support enjoyed by each claimant in the party's organisational and legislative wings in case of a split, besides examining its constitution and the list of office-bearers that was submitted to it when the party was united before allotting the election symbol. Ajit, currently a deputy chief minister in Maharashtra, had walked away with a majority of NCP MLAs in July last year and supported BJP-Shiv Sena government led by Eknath Shinde.The commission had said there were serious inconsistencies in terms of time-lines in the claim of the Sharad Pawar group on organisational majority, which resulted in unreliability of their claim. It had also expressed the hope that political parties will adopt good disclosure practices of organisational elections and internal party democracy. *—PTI*

The poll panel also allotted the NCP's election symbol 'clock' to the group led by Ajit Pawar *PHOTO: PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Four new Covid deaths reported across country

NEW DELHI, 13 FEB

India has logged 123 new cases of Covid, while the number of active cases of the infection stood at 876, according to the Union Health Ministry's data updated on Tuesday. Four new deaths --two from Delhi and one each from Gujarat and Maharashtra-- have been reported in a span of 24 hours, the data updated at 8 am stated. The number of daily cases had dropped to double-digits till 5 December 5, 2023 but cases had begun to increase after emergence of a new variant and cold weather conditions. After 5 December, a maximum of 841 new cases were reported on 31 December, 2023 which is 0.2 per cent of the peak cases reported in May 2021, official sources said. India has witnessed three waves of Covid-19 in the past with the peak incidence of daily new cases and deaths being reported during the Delta wave in April-June 2021.*—PTI*

Assam Govt declares 'Kaji Nemu' as state fruit

GUWAHATI, 13 FEB

The Assam government on Tuesday declared 'Kaji Nemu' (citrus lemon) as the state fruit.'Kaji Nemu' is known for its aroma and health benefits and carries Geographical Indication tag. "It is a laudable decision of our government", Agriculture Minister Atul Bora said. He pointed out that the fruit had received a GI tag in 2016 and has been commercially grown, with it being exported also. The minister also dwelt on the unique qualities of the Kaji Nemu, especially in boosting immunity. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the decision to declare Kaji Nemu as the state fruit will help global attention. *—PTI*

Man rapes minor girl in Odisha, gets 20 years jail

BERHAMPUR, 13 FEB

A Protection of children from of sexual offences (POCSO) court in Odisha's Ganjam district sentenced a man to 20 years rigorous imprisonent for kidnapping and raping a 16-year-old girl about three years ago.Pravat Kumar Rajguru, judge of the special court set up under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act at Berhampur convicted the accused and pronounced the judgment on Monday, said special public prosecutor Narayan Panda.The court has also imposed a Rs 15,000 fine on the accused person, identified as Ajaya Nayak.The court pronounced the judgment after examining and recording the statements of 13 witnesses, including police, and doctor.*—PTI*

Accused in Rajasthan carries reward of 50 paisa

JAIPUR, 13 FEB

A wanted criminal usually carries a cash reward from few thousands to few lakhs, but an accused in Rajasthan carries a reward of 50 paisa, officials on Tuesday said.The message behind this is that the status of the accused in society is worth 50 paise, which is not even in circulation, they said.Jhunjhunu Superintendent of Police (SP) Devendra Vishnoi has done a new experiment and issued a letter in this regard on Monday. A reward of 50 paise has been announced for catching Yogesh Meghwal, who is wanted in a case of arms act registered with the Singhana Police Station. SP said that it was done to give a clear message in the society that the worth or status of criminals in society is worth 50 paise. *—PTI*

Kota horror continues: 3rd student kills self this year

Shubh Choudhary's body was found hanging from the ceiling fan

KOTA, 13 FEB

A 16-year-old JEE aspirant allegedly hanged himself in his hostel room here, hours after the National Testing Agency published the answer key for the first edition of JEE-Main 2024, police said on Tuesday.

This is the third case of suspected "suicide" by coaching students in Kota this year so far, they added.

Shubh Choudhary's body was found hanging from the ceiling fan of his hostel room in the Jawahar Nagar area here on Tuesday morning, Circle Officer (CO) DSP Bhawani Singh said.

Choudhary, who hailed from Chhattisgarh, was a student of Class 12 and had appeared in the JEE-Main 2024 examination, Singh said.

However, the police is yet to ascertain the status of his results, he added.

The National Testing Agency on Monday published the answer key for the first edition examination of JEE-Main 2024 and announced the results on Tuesday.

The teenager allegedly hanged himself some time on Monday night PHOTO: PIXABAY

Choudhary had been preparing for JEE at a coaching institute here and was living in the hostel in Jawahar Nagar area for two years, the police said.

After the boy did not respond to his parents' repeated calls on Tuesday morning, they asked the hostel warden to check on him, the CO said.

Ongoing to his room, the warden found Choudhary's body hanging from a ceiling fan and informed the police, he added.

The teenager allegedly hanged himself some time on Monday night, the CO said, adding that no suicide note was recovered from his room and the actual reason behind the suspected suicide is yet to be ascertained.

In gross violation of norms, the fan in the hostel room was not equipped with an anti-suicide device, the officer said.

- This is the third case of suspected suicide by coaching students in Kota since January. A 27-year-old B.Tech student also hanged himself earlier this month

The body has been placed in a mortuary and a post-mortem will be conducted after the arrival of his parents from Chhattisgarh, he added.

This is the third case of suspected suicide by coaching students in Kota since January. A 27-year-old B.Tech student also hanged himself earlier this month.

Twenty six cases of alleged suicide by coaching students were reported in Kota in 2023, the highest ever in 10 years. Around 2.5 lakh students come every year to this coaching hub from across the country for preparation of engineering and medical entrance exams. *—PTI*

ORDER TO MUNICIPALITIES

Don't wipe out strays from street: Delhi HC

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

Municipal authorities cannot be expected to completely wipe out stray animals including monkeys and dogs from the roads of the national capital, the Delhi High Court has said.

It said the duty of the municipal authorities is to take "concerted, sincere and optimum steps" to ensure that stray animals are rehabilitated and do not become a menace for the residents or traffic plying on the road.

Justice C Hari Shankar made the observations while disposing of a contempt petition against the authorities for failing to obey directions passed by the court in 2019 to ensure the problem is properly dealt with."It cannot be expected that the municipal authorities can completely wipe out, from the roads and municipal areas of Delhi, all stray animals, whether cattle, monkeys, dogs or other animals," the High Court said in its 7 February order.

In the September 2019 order, a division bench of the high court had said, "We expect, from the respondents, that a committee or other type of body will be constituted immediately, in regards to stray cattle, stray dogs, monkeys etc., so that they may evolve some scheme or policy on how to control these stray cattle, street dogs and monkeys and the action will be initiated immediately."It had said it was the duty of the respondents to provide anti-rabies vaccination to government hospitals or dispensaries, which shall be provided at the earliest.

In the plea seeking contempt action against the authorities, petitioner Salek Chand Jain alleged there has been no sufficient compliance with the 2019 directions.The court perused the status reports filed by the authorities in which it was stated that presently, the estimated cattle population in Delhi after the Covid-19 pandemic is around 83,671 and the four Gaushalas present in the city have sufficient space to accommodate abandoned cattle. *—PTI*

Dispose bail applications within 2 weeks: Court

AHMEDABAD, 13 FEB

Gujarat High Court has asked all courts in state to scrupulously follow the directions of Supreme Court regarding the disposal of bail applications within two weeks and anticipatory bail pleas within six weeks.

Bench of Chief Justice Sunita Agarwal and Justice Anuruddha Mayee on Monday passed the order in a petition filed by Bhavesh Rabari against the practice of adjournment of bail pleas for several weeks.

The bench further said that "issuance of rule" practice of admitting bail pleas and then adjourning the same for a final hearing for weeks without going into the merits of the case on the same date needs to be curbed.

High court, in its order, said the procedure for the disposal of bail applications must be followed scrupulously as per the law laid down by the apex court in the case of Satyendra Antil.

High court further observed that there may be cases in which it finds it proper to entertain an application without the applicant having moved the session's courts initially or where it may feel justified in asking the applicant to move the session's court or refer the matter to that court.

"In any case, all depends upon the discretion of the judge hearing the case. It must be left to the judge to exercise the discretion vested in him by the statute depending upon the face of the particular case," Gujarat High Court said.

It is open for learned judge to assess the facts of each case to form an opinion on whether special circumstances existed for not entitling the applicant to approach High Court directly, it added. *—PTI*

BACK IN CHENNAI

18 fishermen arrested by Lankan Navy return home

TAMIL NADU, 13 FEB

The Sri Lankan Navy released the 18 fishermen arrested from Tamil Nadu's Rameswaram for allegedly crossing the border.

The fishermen reached Chennai on Tuesday and were welcomed at the airport. The fishermen were apprehended while they were fishing near DelftIsland in Palk Bay Sea on 8 February.

As per the fishermen's association, two fishing boats were also seized. Earlier on 6 February, 12 fishermen from Tamil Nadu, who were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy on 13 January, were released and reached Chennai airport. The recurring arrests of Indian fishermen by the Sri Lankan navy have become a source of concern, not only for the Central government but also for the authorities in Tamil Nadu. On 5 February, in a move aimed at drawing attention to their longstanding grievances, Rameswaram fishermen held a symbolic strike and outlined a series of demands to address the challenges they face.

The fishermen reached Chennai on Tuesday and were welcomed at the airport PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

The fishermen also declared their intent to return their voter ID cards to the central government and boycott the elections if their demands remain unmet.

Earlier, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin expressed concerns about the increase in attacks on members of the state's fishing community in the region and urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to intervene and resolve the issue at the earliest. *—ANI*

JEE-Main: 23 bag 100 score in first exam

NEW DELHI, 13 FEB

Twenty-three candidates have bagged the perfect 100 score in the engineering entrance exam JEE-Main with a maximum of them being from Telangana, National Testing Agency announced on Tuesday.

Over 11.70 lakh candidates had appeared for the first edition of the crucial exam.

Among the candidates who scored 100 NTA scores, seven are from Telangana, two from Haryana, three each from Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra, two from Delhi and one each from Gujarat, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu."NTA scores are normalised scores across multi-session papers and are based on the relative performance of all those who appeared for the examination in one session.

The marks obtained are converted into a scale ranging from 100 to 0 for each session of examinees," a senior official explained.

Examination was held in Assamese, Bengali, English, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Odia, Punjabi, Tamil etc. *—PTI*

IIM Indore student gets ₹1 crore salary package

NEW DELHI, 13 FEB

An e-commerce company has offered an annual salary of Rs 1 crore to a student of Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Indore. This is the highest annual package offered during the final placement round of this session at IIM-I.

This student has been offered a job in sales and marketing department by a company in the e-commerce industry.

Against the backdrop of "a cooling job market", the season culminated with more than 150 recruiters extending offers to 594 students of two-year Post Graduate Programme (PGP) and five-year Integrated Programme in Management (IPM), this reflects the industry's unwavering trust in the institute and its students.

The statistics for this year consisted of the average CTC (cost to company) at Rs 25.68 lakh per annum. While the median CTC stood at Rs 24.50 LPA, the highest compensation offered on campus stood at Rs 1 crore per annum. *—PTI*

India successfully built best digital economy: Nobel winner Spence

NOIDA, 13 FEB

Nobel laureate economist A Michael Spence, Nobel Prize winner in Economic Sciences in 2001, said the country has successfully developed by far the best digital economy and finance architecture in the world.

Spence shared his views during an interaction with students and faculty at Bennett University in Greater Noida on Monday.

"The major economy with the highest growth rate right now is India. It is open, competitive and delivers services of an inclusive kind to a vast array of territory," the Nobel laureate said, according to a statement issued by the varsity.

With centre of gravity shifting steadily towards East, there is a fundamental change in global economy whereby supply chains are getting diversified and global governance is becoming more complicated than ever before, he added.

He also outlined the enormous progress in science and technology which can contribute to enhancing human welfare, including generative AI, revolutions in biomedical life sciences and massive energy transitions.

He cited the example of competitive pricing of solar energy and quoted the cost of DNA sequencing having reduced from USD 10 million dollar earlier to USD 250 now. However, he added there is downside to this technological growth, and emphasised on its availability to both big and small businesses alike."We now have incredibly powerful scientific and technological tools that, if we use correctly, can be used to essentially deliver wellbeing and opportunity to a wide range of people," said Spence. *—PTI*

Kerala: Tiger caught in fence, rescued

KANNUR, 13 FEB

A male tiger which was trapped in a roadside fence in Kottiyoor near here for several hours was rescued by forest officials on Tuesday afternoon after it was tranquilised.

A senior forest official said that local rubber-tapping workers saw the trapped tiger this morning and informed the forest officials.

Subsequently, the forest officials reached the spot, which was close to a busy village road, and noticed that one of the front paws of the big cat was caught in the fence. Thereafter, the tiger was given a tranquiliser shot at around noon and then moved into a cage, the official said.

"Its health condition is being examined. Doctors are checking its paw which was caught in the fence. There was no loss of blood," the official added.

He also said that since the fence was close to the road, the entire operation was carried out quickly and smoothly. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

- Local rubber-tapping workers saw the trapped tiger in the morning

Gujarat spent ₹277 cr on lion conservation

GANDHINAGAR, 13 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

More than Rs 277 crore were spent on lion conservation in the Gir and Greater Gir areas, the abode of Asiatic lions, in the last two years, the Gujarat government informed the legislative assembly on Tuesday.

Minister of State for Forest and Environment Mukesh Patel said the Centre has approved a National Wildlife Disease Diagnostic and Referral Centre at Junagadh under 'Project Lion', launched to conserve big cats in 2020.The state government has spent Rs 277.93 crore on lion conservation in 2022 and 2023, the minister said, responding to questions by Congress MLAs during the Question Hour of the ongoing budget session of the assembly here.

During this period, 238 lions, including cubs, died. Of these, 209 lions succumbed to natural causes, while 29 deaths were due to unnatural reasons such as big cats getting hit by vehicles or falling into open wells, he said in a written reply.

"To provide timely treatment to lions we have appointed veterinarians and deployed four ambulances" Patel said. *—PTI*

FIRST HINDU TEMPLE

India's holy water used in Abu Dhabi temple

ABU DHABI, 13 FEB

Holy water from Ganga and Yamuna, pink sandstone from Rajasthan, furniture made of wooden trunks used to transport stones from India - the first Hindu stone temple in Abu Dhabi is an architectural marvel made with contributions from different parts of the country.

The temple is set to be inaugurated on Wednesday by Prime Minister Narendra Modi who will lead a dedication ceremony.

On the two sides of the temple, holy water flows from Ganga and Yamuna, which was brought from India in huge containers.

According to temple authorities, an amphitheatre in the shape of a ghat has been built on the side where the water from Ganga flows.

The temple is set to be inaugurated on Wednesday by Prime Minister Narendra Modi PHOTO: PTI

"The idea was to make it resemble the ghat of Varanasi where the visitors can sit, meditate and get transported mentally to ghats back in India. When visitors walk in they will see two streams of water that symbolically represent the Ganga and Yamuna rivers in India. A beam of light to represent the river Saraswati will be directed from the temple structure to form 'Triveni' Sangam," said Vishal Patel, a lead volunteer at the iconic temple.

The temple has been built by the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha on a 27-acre site in Abu Mureikhah, near Al Rahba off the Dubai-Abu Dhabi Sheikh Zayed Highway.The temple's facade features exquisite marble carvings set against a sandstone backdrop, crafted from more than 25,000 pieces of stone by skilled artisans from Rajasthan and Gujarat. A substantial number of pink sandstone were transported from northern Rajasthan to Abu Dhabi for the temple.

Vishal Brahmabhatt, who supervises procurement and logistics at the site, told PTI that more than two lakh cubic feet of "sacred" stone has been transported in more than 700 containers for the temple's construction.

The wooden trunks and containers in which the stones were packed and transported to Abu Dhabi have been reused to make furniture at the temple. Swami Brahmaviharidas, head of international relations for BAPS, "The entire furniture which has been placed at various places inside the temple including prayer halls, cafeteria, community centre etc has been made using the wood from the boxes and trunks which were used to transport the stones. There is a bit of India in every corner of the temple".The temple complex is bordered by buildings that house prayer halls, a community centre to host cultural events, a library, a children's park and an amphitheatre through which a stream cuts across. The work for the structure has been going on since 2019. The land for the temple was donated by the UAE government. *—PTI*

FARMERS ON ROAD, AGAIN

A policeman speaks with farmers blocking a road during a protest, in Tiruchirappalli, on Tuesday. The Tamil Nadu farmers have extended support to the ongoing 'Delhi Chalo march
PHOTO: PTI

Traders turn back to cash payments amid Paytm row

By Archana Shukla

A small grocery store in financial capital Mumbai has begun asking customers to pay cash as a popular digital payments service, which it used until now, is facing uncertainty over its survival.

India's central bank has asked Paytm - the company that revolutionised digital payments in the country - to stop all services offered by its banking division, also known as the wallet service, due to "persistent non-compliance" of its rules. The division supports Swift payments through the Paytm app, which has more than 330 million users.

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has reportedly accused Paytm of financial crimes, including falsifying customer information and money laundering.

It has asked the company to stop accepting deposits into people's Paytm bank accounts, or wallets, from 1 March, although customers would be allowed to continue making payments until the balance in their accounts is exhausted.

Meanwhile, Paytm has denied the allegations. In a statement the company said that "the Paytm app remains fully operational, and our services are unaffected".

The app can continue to facilitate quick payments between non-Paytm bank accounts as an intermediary but it can't accept direct deposits.

This would severely impact the company's wallet business. Paytm wallet is almost like a bank account in which people can receive deposits, keep money and make payments - all done by scanning a QR code or using mobile phone numbers as their identity.

People can also transfer money from their wallets to their accounts in other banks and vice-versa.

Not surprisingly, the regulatory crackdown has come as a blow to thousands of small business owners who relied on the app for making quick and easy transactions.

It has also left Paytm in a dire state, as investors pulled out billions of rupees after the company's shares began to tank following the order.

Paytm has been trying to reassure merchants through calls and messages
PHOTO: PIXABAY

Industry experts say the move could be a precursor to the payments bank losing its license in the next few weeks - further adding to investor nervousness.

On Thursday, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said Paytm had been given sufficient time to rectify lapses.

A Paytm spokesperson told the BBC that the firm was taking the RBI directive "very seriously".

"We respect the RBI's decision and are working diligently to address the concerns raised," the spokesperson added.

Paytm's founder Vijay Shekhar Sharma, once named as India's youngest billionaire, has been firefighting. He is motivating employees, calming investors and assuring merchants.Sharma met RBI officials and reportedly even approached the country's finance minister for help.

This isn't the first time that Paytm has run into trouble with the banking regulator. Since 2018, the RBI has pulled up the firm at least four times over a series of lapses.

Srinath Sridharan, a financial expert, says that the central bank's concerns are serious.

Launched in 2010, Paytm gained popularity after India banned high-denomination notes in 2016, a move that sucked cash out of circulation and boosted online transactions.

People began using the app for a range of transactions, including buying household goods, paying tuk-tuk drivers and even utility bills. Paytm saw big investments by Japanese technology investor SoftBank and counted Warren Buffett and China's Alibaba among its early investors.

The Paytm payments bank - which is at the centre of the current regulatory storm - got its banking license in 2017.

The bank can accept deposits of up to Rs 2,00,000 but it cannot lend money; it offers digital banking services, fixed deposits, and sells third-party insurance and loans.

The bank has 50 million accounts, including those of merchants who accept payments using the platform's blue-and-white QR code stickers.

Sharma has said that his company is exploring third-party banks to provide back-end banking support to merchant accounts, whose transactions contribute half of Paytm's revenues.

But this would mean that the margins earned on deposits and transactions would have to be shared with the partner bank and would further strain an already loss-making entity - Paytm has lost nearly 80% market value since its stock market listing two years ago.

Additionally, the company might face challenges finding a banking partner due to the regulatory hassles its currently mired in.

Paytm has been trying to reassure merchants through calls and messages, but analysts say severe restrictions and uncertainty is likely to impact the company's customer retention.

Traders have begun shifting from Paytm to other payment options. Banks, including the government-run State Bank of India (SBI), have already offered to help merchants transition with new QR codes and point-of-sale machines.

According to data by market intelligence firm, Sensor Tower, Paytm app has seen a 20% reduction in downloads since the RBI ruling, while rival apps like Google Pay and PhonePe have seen a 50% jump in downloads, Reuters news agency reported.

The bigger battle to fight will be on reputation, say experts.

Experts say the ongoing crisis at the firm has raised questions about the efficiency of the firm's managing board, which includes finance veterans and former RBI officials, and that the banking regulator may seek changes in the board's management structure.

They have also expressed concerns over controlling interest of the founder in both the parent entity - One97 Communications, which houses the digital payments business - and the payments bank, saying the two are not operating at arm's length.

—BBC News

SALAR

India under Modi: Policies, schemes or propaganda?

Kavitha Reddy

Clockwise from top left: Jawaharlal Nehru, PV Narasimha Rao, Narendra Modi and Manmohan Singh
PHOTO: ANI

First prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru inspired generations of Indians to strive for the best. His words, "That future is not one of ease or resting but of incessant striving so that we may fulfil the pledges we have so often taken and the one we shall take today. The service of India means the service of the millions who suffer. It means the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity. The ambition of the greatest man of our generation has been to wipe every tear from every eye. That may be beyond us, but as long as there are tears and suffering, so long our work will not be over," were not only pragmatic, but they reflected a true visionary and nationalist in him.

Not many in the current generation or even in politics can relate to the difficult times India got her independence, and what it took to reach $3.75 trillion GDP in 2024 (7.75 per cent of global GDP) from Rs 2.7 lakh crore GDP (3 per cent of global GDP) in 1947. From Nehru to Manmohan Singh, each of our prime ministers put the people of the nation ahead of their glories.

Nehru set the roadmap of modern India with the implementation of the Constitution written by Dr BR Ambedkar. He brought in the Hindu Code, which liberated millions of women. He built world-class institutions and infrastructure including ISRO, PSUs, IITs, AIIMS, and dams which laid the foundation of a sovereign India. He not only shaped India's foreign policy but was instrumental in creating an alternate power equation through the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Nehru's five-year plan put the development of the primary sector in the spotlight, and India recorded a 3.6 per cent GDP growth. Although the Indo-China war dented Nehru's image, he took the blame for not being able to see the Chinese aggression even as he signed peace treaties.

Lal Bahadur Shastri, in his short tenure, left a large footprint by making India food-sufficient via the Green Revolution, and the White Revolution, and setting up the Food Corporation of India. "Jai Jawan Jai Kisan" became a national slogan that immortalized Lal Bahadur Shastri's policy of food and national security.

Indira Gandhi, India's first woman prime minister, furthered the agenda of making the wealth of the nation accessible to all with land reforms and the nationalisation of banks. India was made a nuclear power under her, and she also ensured the liberation of Bangladesh by winning the war against Pakistan. Even though the Emergency was a blot on democracy, Indira's comeback was more popular than ever. She strengthened foreign policy, and food security, and displayed an iron hand against terrorism and insurgency.

After Indira's assassination, her son Rajiv Gandhi was made the prime minister. He laid the foundation of technology-enabled India. He reduced the voting age of a person to 18 years. Computerisation, the National Education Policy, the telecom revolution, panchayat raj system put India on an aggressive growth path. He also established policies that enabled India to become a global leader in vaccination production.

PV Narasimha Rao, the Father of Economic Reforms, ended license raj and created jobs. He facilitated the nuclear program that led to the second nuclear test during prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the first non-Congress prime minister to complete a full term. His Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan brought much-needed attention to education. Golden quadrilateral, highways, and village roads saw a giant transformation in road infrastructure during his tenure.

Manmohan Singh, probably the most unexpected of the prime ministers, as an economist, strengthened the economy and put it on the fast track. He insulated the economy from global recession. The right-based flagship programs that include the Right to Education, Right to Information, MGNREGA, Aadhaar, DBT, and Civil Nuclear Agreement remain the most successful programs.

However, even though under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership there has not been a major flagship programme, he has criticised 65 years of achievements of the nation on every possible occasion. He renamed most of the existing programmes to claim ownership, but he has not shown any accountability over issues such as the de-monetisation decision, Covid deaths, Rafale scam, Manipur unrest, Pulwama terror attack, his friendship with Gautam Adani and Mukesh Ambani, and over destabilising elected state governments.

When Modi took the oath he spoke about 'minimum government, maximum governance', but the opportunities to steer the nation on a progressive path were lost in slogans such as 'Acche Din', 'Saab Ka Saat, Saab Ka Vikas', 'Shrestha Bharat', 'Swacch Bharat', 'Viksit Bharat'.

Abrogation of Article 370, Citizenship Bill (CAA), and Triple Talaq Bill continue to be showcased as achievements.

Under the regime issues such as lack of transparency in governance, authoritarianism, weakening of the federal structure, headline management, divide of South and North on power devolution, funds, language, unemployment and poverty, rising crime against women, Dalits and minorities, misuse of law enforcement agencies, muting the media, increasing in the wealth gap between rich and poor, vendetta politics, and blurring of the lines between politics and religion are threatening the Constitution.

India's 'cultural nationalism' is being engulfed by BJP 'religious nationalism', and the fear of majoritarian politics is creating unrest in the minds of people who believe in the idea of India that the founding leaders had established. Are we moving far away from the essence of the 'Tryst with Destiny speech'? Are we embracing fanaticism where policies and programmes are being replaced by propaganda?

Kavitha Reddy is KPCC General Secretary and the author's veiws are personal

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

Houthis' new slogan calls America the 'mother of terrorism'

Yemen's Houthi militants continue to disrupt shipping in the Red Sea, undeterred by the intensifying Western airstrikes or the group's re-designation as a "global terrorist" organisation. As their attacks have intensified, the group's slogan (or sarkha, meaning "scream") has also gained notoriety.

Banners bearing the sarkha dot the streets in areas of Yemen under Houthi control and are brandished by supporters at their rallies. It declares: "God is Great, death to America, death to Israel, a curse upon the Jews, victory to Islam." (The mentions of the Houthis' enemies appear in a red font resembling barbed wire).

Many commentators are quick to point out the origins of the sarkha can be traced to a motto from the Iranian revolution. The link reveals the longstanding relationship between the Houthis and their principal regional backer, Iran.

The sarkha also carries an anti-imperialist message, which has caused some outside analysts to overestimate the Houthis' local legitimacy and diminish the suffering of ordinary Yemenis living under their brutal and exclusionary rule.

Since the Houthis' re-designation as a global terrorist organisation, another slogan has become prevalent on placards at their rallies. Set against a red background, it reads: "America is the mother of terrorism."

At first glance, this appears to be an extension of the ideological sentiments conveyed in the sarkha.

However, this slogan also reflects the complexity of Yemeni views about US counterterrorism interventions and the widespread belief that these have provided terrorist groups with the oxygen they need to survive.

Terror groups as a tool of the state

The US has long been criticised for disproportionately killing civilians in counterterrorism strikes. Some experts argue this may create more "terrorists" than it kills.

Another critique: it was the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) that originally supported Osama bin Laden and the mujahideen in Afghanistan in an attempt to trap the Soviet Union in an unwinnable war, making the US at least somewhat responsible for what followed.

However, there are other layers to these slogans that are less intuitively understood by a Western audience.

Houthi supporters pass a mural during a protest against recent US and UK strikes on the Yemeni militant group
PHOTO: EPA

The West's reflexive support for authoritarian leaders who claim to be targeting terrorism is widely seen in Yemen (and throughout the Middle East) as fuelling a symbiotic relationship between oppressive regimes, terrorist groups and Western-led military interventions.

For many in the region, groups like al-Qaeda and Islamic State function, in part, as "tools" that Western-backed authoritarian leaders use to maintain their power. They provide plausible deniability for the violence these leaders use against civilians, or support their pitch that "if I'm gone, terrorists will take over the country".

In Yemen, there is a long history of allegations that Western-backed leaders have:

releasedal-Qaeda prisoners so they could regroup facilitated al-Qaeda attacks against local and foreign targets misdirected US strikes to kill political opponents rather than al-Qaeda leaders.

The West's regional partners, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have also been accused of recruiting al-Qaeda members to fight in paramilitary forces against Yemeni opponents.

As a result, many Yemenis wouldn't view al-Qaeda or Islamic State as being completely separate from those in charge of the country. Rather, they often see these terrorist groups as helping to reinforce the status quo.

This view is, of course, diametrically opposed to Western understandings of al-Qaeda or Islamic State. In the West, these groups are framed as rebels seeking to overturn the state. But across the region, many believe these relationships defy simple categories like "state versus insurgent" or "friend versus enemy" because terror groups can be both at once.

One Yemeni analyst articulated the frustration of trying to explain the symbiotic relationship between terrorist groups and authoritarian leaders in the Middle East:

Why the West's policies are backfiring

For the Houthis, America's alleged role in helping to fuel terrorist groups has been a longstanding part of the group's messaging.

Over a decade ago – two years before the Houthis seized the Yemeni capital and sparked a lengthy war – I visited a northern town where there were several large, freshly painted murals bearing the statement "al-Qaeda is American made".

When I asked residents about the this, they appeared to see the statement as a banal declaration of fact. They were more impressed by the "nice handwriting" than the message. (Like the banners bearing the sarkha, the murals used a red barbed-wire font for the word "America".)

The Houthis' message about American complicity in terrorism resonates because it works at several levels.

It gestures to the violence unleashed by the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq, the near-unconditional support the US provides to Israel, and the military, carceral and political support the US and its Western partners provide authoritarian leaders in the region.

It also gets at the profound sense within Yemen (and across the region) that the political status quo is sustained by violent regimes. And that terrorist groups like al-Qaeda – and the counterterrorism interventions they invite – are part of how those regimes maintain their power.

Of course, the violence the Houthis use to sustain their own power is an irony that should not be lost. The Houthis are widely despised by Yemenis who live under their rule. Even so, their messaging taps into widespread views about the drivers of regional violence that some Western observers have long dismissed.

Indeed, the complexities

PHOTO: X/ THAKSINLIVE

Thailand's former PM Shinawatra to be freed

BANGKOK, 13 FEB

Thailand's jailed former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra is set to be freed. Thaksin, 74, who was jailed for eight years for abuse of power before a royal pardon reduced the term to one year, was granted release on parole, Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin told reporters on Tuesday. "It's official," Srettha said, stressing that everything had been carried out according to the law. "Once released he will be a normal citizen. What's in the past is in the past." Thaksin returned to Thailand last August following more than 14 years in exile, and was taken immediately to court where he was jailed for eight years for abuse of power. Thaksin was transferred to hospital after a single night in prison when his blood pressure soared. Soon afterwards, the king gave him a royal pardon, reducing the sentence to one year. *—Al Jazeera*

1 dead, 5 injured in New York subway station shooting

NEW YORK, 13 FEB

One person was killed and five others injured in a shooting incident at a subway station in the Bronx country in New York on Monday evening, ABC News reported quoting police. According to the report, around 4:30 p.m. ET, officers responded to 911 calls of a shooting at the Mount Eden Avenue station and found six people shot, New York city Police Department (NYPD) Chief of Transit Michael M Kemper told reporters at a media briefing Monday night. After the shooting incident, four men and two women were taken to local hospitals and 34 year old man died at St. Barnabas Hospital, Kemper said. The injuries to the other victims were not life-threatening, according to the police. *—ANI*

Indian-American sworn in as deputy to USAID admin

WASHINGTON, 13 FEB

Sonali Korde, an Indian-American expert in legislative affairs and budgeting, has been sworn in as assistant to USAID Administrator Samantha Power for the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance. "I view Sonali, and I think this packed house speaks to this for so many here, but Sonali is really a gift to us all. And because we get to see a lot of her, in time, and a lot of her many qualities, which I will dwell on," Power said during the swearing-in ceremony on Monday. She said Korde's parents, who migrated from India, gave her an incredible upbringing that endowed her with a deep appreciation for a world outside of their Cranford, New Jersey, home. *—PTI*

Philippines landslide: Death toll rises to 68

MANILA, 13 FEB

At least 68 people are now known to have died after a landslide swept through a goldmining village in the Philippines almost a week ago. Officials say there are still 51 people missing following Tuesday's disaster in Davao de Oro province, but rescue workers admit there is little hope of finding any more survivors. A three-year-old girl was the last person pulled alive from the mud. Her rescue - after more than 60 hours buried - was described as "a miracle". Edward Macapili, a disaster agency official of the Davao de Oro province, said at the time it have given "hope to the rescuers". But on Monday, those hopes appeared to have faded. "It is almost a week after the incident and... we are assuming that no one is alive there," Mr Macapili told AFP news agency. "There is already a foul smell in the area now so there's a need to fast-track the retrieval." *—BBC News*

No govt can be formed in Pak without Khan: Party leader

PTI chief Latif Khosa won 101 seats in 266-member National Assembly

ISLAMABAD, 13 FEB

No democracy can function and no government can be formed in Pakistan without jailed former prime minister Imran Khan, a senior party leader asserted on Tuesday as rival political parties were in talks to form a coalition government.

Expressing astonishment at reports of a power-sharing formula being discussed between the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP), Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party leader Latif Khosa described it as a joke that rival political parties were putting forward such a proposal.

The 71-year-old jailed cricketer-turned-politician and PTI founder will have to be brought back, he said. "Who are they - who have been rejected by the people - to divide among themselves... No Assembly or Parliament can function without Imran Khan. No democracy can function and no government can be formed with Imran Khan.

Independent candidates, mostly backed by Imran Khan's PTI, won 101 seats *PHOTO: X/AL JAZEERA (SCREENGRAB)*

"So rid yourself of the misunderstanding that by minusing Imran they will be able to operate a democracy or the government. You will have to bring Imran Khan back," Dawn News quoted Khosa as saying.

Independent candidates, mostly backed by Khan's PTI, won 101 seats in the 266-member National Assembly in the 8 February general elections. Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's PML-N has won 75 seats and former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto's PPP has won 54 seats. He said the election results were "correct" up till the issuance of the Form 45.

"According to the Form 45, as many as 170 of our people are winning. They are not independent because PTI exists as a legal and constitutional party. Calling us independent is wrong and illegal," he said. *—PTI*

Terror threat looms over Karachi: NACTA

KARACHI, 13 FEB

The National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) has issued a threat alert for Karachi, the capital of Sindh, cautioning of potential terrorist attacks at significant locations, as per ARY News.

As outlined in the handout released by the internal security watchdog, key government buildings or installations are at risk of being targeted by terrorist elements. The notification, titled "Terrorist Activities in Karachi," disclosed that four unidentified terrorists have trained a suicide bomber, likely for deployment in various areas of Karachi, as reported by ARY News.

The document further identifies the individuals involved in the terrorist plot as Arsalan, Mushtaq, Abid, and Ghazanfar, who are reportedly organizing for suicide bombings within the port city.

- As outlined in the handout released by the internal security watchdog, key government buildings or installations are at risk of being targeted by terrorist elements

According to ARY News, highlighted in the alert are key installations such as the Sindh Assembly, CM House Sindh, Press Club Karachi, and Sindh High Court, as well as hospitals and schools, which are advised to be placed under strict surveillance.

This alert follows a surge in terrorist activities across the nation, particularly in KP and Balochistan, subsequent to the cessation of the ceasefire between the government and the outlawed militant group Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan in November 2022. *—ANI*

Trump seeks US SC pause in election case

WASHINGTON, 13 FEB

Ex-US president Donald Trump has asked the Supreme Court to suspend a lower court ruling that he does not have presidential immunity from prosecution.

He had claimed in his election interference case he could not be tried for acts carried out as president. Three lower court judges disagreed, ruling that he can be prosecuted like any other citizen. But Trump's lawyers said he should not be tried during an election campaign.

"Conducting a months-long criminal trial of Trump at the height of election season will radically disrupt President Trump's ability to campaign against President Biden," Trump's attorneys wrote in the filing. The Supreme Court will now decide if it will put the ruling on hold to allow Trump to appeal.

The conservative-majority top court granting the request would lead to a long delay in the landmark criminal case alleging that Trump plotted to illegally overturn the 2020 election, possibly until after the November election.

However, if the Supreme Court declines to put the ruling on pause, the federal trial overseen by Judge Tanya Chutkan will be scheduled, likely for spring.

As Trump vies for White House, he faces three other criminal trials in addition to this one. He faces charges in Georgia for an alleged attempt to overturn the 2020 election results in the state and a seven-count indictment in Florida over his handling of classified documents after he left the White House.

The third, based in New York, is related to the alleged concealment of a payment to adult film star Stormy Daniels. He has pleaded not guilty against the charges in all the cases. Trump's legal team has also made repeated attempts to delay his criminal trials until after the 2024 election. In the federal election interference trial, Trump has been charged with four counts: conspiracy to defraud the US, conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding, obstruction of an official proceeding, and conspiracy against the rights of citizens. *—BBC News*

Supreme Court declines to put the ruling on pause *PHOTO: PTI*

Indonesia's poll has high stakes for US, China

JAKARTA, 13 FEB

When Indonesians cast their votes on Wednesday for a new president in one of the world's biggest elections, the stakes will also be high for the United States and China and their mounting rivalry in the region.

The Southeast Asian nation is a key battleground economically and politically in a region where the global powers have long been on a collision course over Taiwan, human rights, US military deployments and Beijing's aggressive actions in disputed waters, including the South China Sea.

Outgoing President Joko Widodo's foreign policy has avoided criticising either Beijing or Washington, but also rejected alignment with either power. The delicate balancing act has paved the way for substantial Chinese trade and investment for Indonesia, including a $7.3 billion high-speed railway that was largely funded by China, while Jakarta has also boosted defence ties and intensified military exercises with the US.

These policies would likely continue if election frontrunner Prabowo Subianto, the current defence minister whose vice presidential running mate is Widodo's eldest son, wins, according to analysts.

"The problem for great powers, however, is that Jakarta is assiduously non-aligned and almost certainly will remain as such regardless of who wins," said Derek Grossman, a senior defence analyst at Rand Corp., a US-based think tank. *—AP*

CARNIVAL CELEBRATIONS

Performers from the Salgueiro samba school parade during Carnival celebrations at the Sambadrome in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

Russia, West clash over Ukraine at UN Security Council Meeting

UNITED NATIONS, 13 FEB

Russia accused the West on Monday of sabotaging agreements that would have prevented the war in Ukraine -- but the US and its allies put the blame squarely on Moscow, saying there is no escaping that President Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion of its smaller neighbour. Days before the second anniversary of Russia's invasion on 24 February, 2022, Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia again put the cause of the war down to the failure to implement the 2015 Minsk agreements, which he blamed on "Kyiv's sabotage" supported by the West. The agreements aimed to resolve the conflict between Ukraine and Russia-backed separatists that flared in April 2014 after Russia's annexation of Crimea.

The agreements aimed to resolve the conflict between Ukraine and Russia *PHOTO: PTI*

At Monday's Security Council meeting that Russia called on the seventh anniversary of the signing of the Minsk peace plan brokered by France and Germany, Nebenzia called claims by Ukraine and Western nations that Russia refused to implement the agreements "absolutely baseless".

Had the Minsk agreements been implemented, Nebenzia said "the tragedy that has taken place in Ukraine today would not have happened, a tragedy in which the US and the collective West are complicit as they try to achieve their geopolitical aims at the cost of Ukraine and the lives of its citizens". *—AP*

CLIMATE 'TROIKA'

COP hosts to curb global warming to 1.5C

DUBAI, 13 FEB

The United Arab Emirates, Azerbaijan and Brazil, former and future hosts of UN climate summits, are joining forces to push for an international agreement to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit).

On Tuesday, the UAE's Conference of the Parties (COP28) presidency said that it would form a "troika" to focus on ensuring that more ambitious CO2-cutting pledges are made ahead of a deadline at the COP30 summit to be held in 2025 in Belem, Brazil. Azerbaijan will host this year's United Nations climate event in November.

"We cannot afford to lose momentum, we must do everything we can to keep 1.5 C within reach," said Sultan Al Jaber, the Emirati president of last year's negotiations.

UAE's Conference of the Parties (COP28) presidency said that it would form a "troika" *PHOTO: X/COP28*

In 2015, almost 200 governments signed the unprecedented Paris climate agreement to phase out fossil fuels in favour of renewable energy in the second half of the century by capping global warming at 1.5C.

That target is fast slipping out of reach, as global greenhouse gas emissions continue to soar. The next round of countries' climate targets is seen as a crucial last chance to prevent global warming exceeding the 1.5C limit.

The troika partnership should "significantly enhance international cooperation and the international enabling environment to stimulate ambition in the next round of nationally determined contributions", read the final agreement reached at COP28.

Last week European climate monitors reported that for the first time global warming had exceeded temperatures of 1.5C over a 12-month period, in what scientists called a "warning to humanity". Storms, drought and fires lashed the planet as climate change, as well as the El Nino weather phenomenon that warms the surface waters in the eastern Pacific Ocean, made 2023 the planet's hottest year in global records going back to 1850. *—Al Jazeera*

RED SEA CRISIS

US says ship hit by Houthis was headed to Iran

The Iran-linked Houthis had identified the vessel as US-linked on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

WASHINGTON, 13 FEB

The United States has claimed that a cargo ship hit by missiles fired by Houthi fighters in Yemen was headed to Iran.

US Central Command (CENTCOM) said early on Tuesday that the MV Star Iris was transiting through the Red Sea to reach the port city of Bandar Imam Khomeini in southern Iran. The US military asserted in a post on X that the vessel was carrying a shipment of corn from Brazil. It identified the Star Iris as a "Greek-owned, Marshall Islands-flagged cargo vessel".

The Iran-linked Houthis had identified the vessel as US-linked on Monday and confirmed hitting it while it travelled in waters off Yemen.

The armed group said that the ship was targeted with "a number of suitable naval missiles" in "accurate and direct" strikes. The Houthis have attacked numerous ships that it said were linked to Israel, the US or United Kingdom in the Red Sea in recent months. The campaign, which the group claims is a show of unity with Palestinians and will continue while Israel continues to bombard Gaza, has disrupted the key trade route between Europe and Asia.

Yahya Saree, the Houthis military spokesman said that the attack on the vessel, owned by the US-listed, Greece-based firm Star Bulk Carriers Corp, came "in vindication of the oppressed Palestinian people, in support and solidarity with our brothers in the Gaza Strip".

The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations confirmed that a vessel was attacked by two missiles at 00:35 GMT some 40 nautical miles (74km) south of al-Mukha (Mocha) in Yemen.

"The crew are reported safe and the vessel is proceeding to next port of call," it said, advising transit through waters near Yemen with caution. Saree also called the attack "retaliation to the American-British aggression on our country".

In recent weeks, the US and UK have responded to the continuing attacks on maritime traffic by launching strikes on Houthi-held Yemeni territory. *—Al Jazeera*

CIA director in Egypt for new talks

WASHINGTON, 13 FEB

William Burns is in Cairo for the latest round of discussions on a truce that would temporarily halt fighting in exchange for the release of captives and Palestinian prisoners. His visit comes after Washington and the United Nations warned Israel against carrying out a ground offensive into Rafah without a plan to protect about 1.4 million civilians sheltering from the war there. Qatar and Egypt have engaged in intense negotiations to establish a prolonged truce in Gaza. *—Al Jazeera*

Israel eliminates over 30 Hamas terrorists

TEL AVIV, 13 FEB

Israeli soldiers continued their operations in the Gaza Strip as one combat team eliminated more than 30 Hamas terrorists during the past day, the Israel Defence Forces said.

In the last 24 hours, a combat team from the 7th Brigade operating in western Khan Yunis eliminated over 30 terrorists while carrying out raids on Hamas terror infrastructure, sniper ambushes and patrols.

Also in West Khan Yunis, soldiers killed two terrorists who tried to move under the cover of the civilian population. When one of the terrorists was spotted pointing a gun at a protected Israeli military vehicle, troops reacted immediately and eliminated the terrorist.

In addition, in the Khan Yunis area, soldiers located several terrorists transporting cargo on a motorcycle.

The fighters directed an air strike that eliminated the squad.

Meanwhile, soldiers also directed attacks on two military depots located inside terrorists' houses. *—ANI*

Protest over poll delay postponed in Senegal

DAKAR, 13 FEB

A protest march scheduled for Tuesday against Senegalese President Macky Sall's controversial move to delay this month's presidential poll to December has been postponed after authorities banned it, organisers said.

Elymane Haby Kane, one of the organisers of the march, told AFP news agency he received an official letter from local authorities in the capital, Dakar, that the march was banned as it could seriously hamper traffic "We will postpone the march because we want to remain within the law," said Malick Diop, coordinator of a collective that called the protest. "The march was banned." Mobile internet coverage was also restricted, just as it had been on the day of the parliamentary vote. *—Al Jazeera*

Stock markets rebound on buying in banking, IT stocks

ICICI Bank, Axis Bank, Wipro, Kotak were among major gainers

MUMBAI, 13 FEB

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded on Tuesday on buying in banking, financial services and IT sector stocks.

The 30-share BSE Sensex surged 482.70 points or 0.68 per cent to settle at 71,555.19. The gauge moved between the day's high of 71,662.74 and a low of 70,924.30 during intraday.

The broader NSE Nifty also soared 127.20 points or 0.59 per cent to close at 21,743.25.

As many as 25 stocks of the 30-share barometer settled in green while 11 constituents of Nifty50 closed the session with losses.

ICICI Bank, Axis Bank, Wipro, Kotak Mahindra Bank and NTPC were among the major gainers in the Sensex pack.

The five stocks that defied the trend included UltraTech Cement, Mahindra & Mahindra, Titan, Tata Motors and Nestle.

BSE smallcap index inched up 0.18 per cent while midcap and largecap indices closed with a gain of 0.61 per cent each.

In Asia, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 and China's Shanghai Composite settled in the positive territory while Hong Kong's Hang Seng was in the red.

European markets were in the red with CAC 40 of France and DAX of Germany declining 0.32 per cent and 0.62 per cent, respectively.

The US market ended Monday's session on a mixed note.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude rose 0.78 per cent to USD 82.64 a barrel on Tuesday.

On Monday, Sensex settled 523 points or 0.73 per cent lower at 71,072.49 points while the Nifty closed 166.45 points or 0.76 per cent down at 21,616.05 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers as they bought equities worth Rs 126.60 crore, according to exchange data. *—PTI*

The broader NSE Nifty also soared 127.20 points or 0.59 per cent to close at 21,743.25 *PHOTO: PTI*

- On Monday, Sensex settled 523 points or 0.73 per cent lower at 71,072.49 points while the Nifty closed 166.45 points or 0.76 per cent down at 21,616.05 points.

Paytm shares plunge 10%, hit 52-week low

NEW DELHI, 13 FEB

Shares of One97 Communications, which owns the brand Paytm on Tuesday plunged nearly 10 per cent a day after RBI Governor Das ruled out any review of the central bank's action against Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL), saying that its decisions are well thought out.

The stock of the company tumbled 7.50 per cent at Rs 390.90 apiece on the BSE.

Shares of One97 Communications dropped 7.28 per cent at Rs 391.45 per piece on the NSE.

During intra-day trade, the shares of the fintech company reached its 52-week low of Rs 385.60 on the NSE and Rs 385.75 on the BSE.

The 30-share BSE Sensex benchmark jumped 436.83 points or 0.61 per cent at 71,509.32, while NSE Nifty advanced 0.56 per cent at 21,737.75 points.

On Monday, RBI Guv Das said, it is not against any fintech, but its prime objective is to protect the interest of customers and depositors.

Regarding the action taken against PPBL, he said directives against any regulated entities are taken whenever it finds that they don't take any action even after they are told to comply with the regulations.

In a major action against PPBL, the central bank, on January 31, directedit to stop accepting deposits or top-ups in any customer accounts, wallets, FASTags, and other instruments after 29 February. *—PTI*

ON 16 FEBRUARY

The previous strike plan, however, was deferred after a court ordered the company to pay salaries as per the pact *PHOTO: PTI*

Trade unions call for coal workers' strike

NEW DELHI, 13 FEB

Central trade unions have called an all-India one-day strike at establishments of the state-run Coal India on 16 February, a regulatory filing stated.

The announcement assumes significance as the supplies from Coal India, the world's largest coal producer, is crucial for electricity generation. It remains to be seen whether the strike would have any major impact on the supplies to power plants.

The strike notice has been issued by Hind Mazdoor Sangh (HMS), All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) and Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU).

While the regulatory filing did not mention the exact reason behind the strike call, the central trade unions had issued a similar notice for strike in October, when they demanded the company to pay salary to non-executive employees according to National Coal Wage Agreement (NCWA) XI.

The previous strike plan, however, was deferred after a court ordered the company to pay salaries as per the latest wage pact.

In June this year, the coal ministry said it approved a wage revision agreement that was reached with trade unions for non-executive employees of Coal India.

The agreement provides for 19 per cent of the minimum guaranteed benefit from 1 July, 2021 on emoluments -- basic, variable dearness allowance (VDA), special dearness allowance (SDA), and attendance bonus -- besides a 25 per cent increase in allowances.

Rupee settles flat at 83 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 13 FEB

The rupee settled flat at 83 against the US dollar on Tuesday, as the support from a rally in domestic equities was negated by a strong greenback overseas and rising crude oil prices.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 83 against the dollar, and touched an intraday high of 82.98 and a low of 83.02. The rupee finally settled at 83.00 (provisional), unchanged from its previous close. On Monday, the rupee appreciated 7 paise to close at 83 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, India's industrial production growth slowed to 3.8 per cent in December 2023, mainly due to poor performance of mining and power generation segments, according to official data released on Monday. Retail inflation declined to a three-month low of 5.1 per cent in January, mainly due to subdued prices of vegetables, fruits and other food items, according to government data released on Monday. *—PTI*

Gold falls Rs 50; silver remains flat

NEW DELHI, 13 FEB

Gold prices fell Rs 50 to Rs 63,100 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday amid a fall in the precious metal's prices globally, according to HDFC Securities. The yellow metal had closed at Rs 63,150 per 10g in the previous trade.

However, silver remained flat at Rs 75,400 per kilogram. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 63,100 per 10 grams, down Rs 50 from the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,021 per ounce, down USD 1 from the previous close. Silver was quoting with gains at USD 22.82 per ounce. Gold prices declined marginally due to a strengthening in the dollar and US Treasury yields, before crucial US consumer inflation data, which is scheduled to release later on Tuesday, Gandhi added. *—PTI*

India's coal import rises 27 per cent in December

NEW DELHI, 13 FEB

India's coal import registered a rise of 27.2 per cent to 23.35 Million Tonne (MT) in December, over the corresponding month of the previous fiscal. The coal ministry is aiming for zero thermal coal import by FY26.

The country's coal import was 18.35 MT in the corresponding month of the previous fiscal, according to data compiled by mjunction services ltd. Coal imports in December 2023 stood around 23.35 million tonne... Imports in December 2023 were up by 27.25 per cent as compared to 18.35 MT recorded for December 2022," it said. Of the total imports in December, non-coking coal imports stood at 15.47 MT, against 10.61 MT imported in December 2022. Coking coal import volume was 4.84 MT, against 4.71 MT imported in the same month of the previous financial year.The coal import in the April-December period of the current fiscal increased to 192.43 MT, over 191.82 MT in the year-ago period. *—PTI*

'Cost structure a challenge for e-commerce'

NEW DELHI, 13 FEB

E-commerce in India is at a nascent stage and cost structure of logistics is the biggest challenge for the segment, a top official of Flipkart said on Tuesday.

Speaking at Walmart Growth Summit, Flipkart CEO Kalyan Krishnamurthy said the government has simplified taxation and adopted ease of doing business as a strategy, which is one of the factors driving growth of the e-commerce segment. "One of the biggest challenges for e-commerce alone to solve is the cost structure of logistics. India, in general is a low-ticket price market. *—PTI*

Go First gets 60 more day to file insolvency, says NCLT

NEW DELHI, 13 FEB

National Company Law Tribunal on Tuesday extended the deadline for another 60 days to complete the resolution process of grounded airline Go First.

A two-member bench of the Delhi-based NCLT admitted the plea filed by the resolution professional (RP) of Go First seeking an extension of the timeline to complete the corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP).

Diwakar Maheshwari, appearing for RP, argued that so far three parties have submitted their expression of interest for Go First and deposited the earnest money.

These firms are expected to submit resolution plans for Go First which has been undergoing CIRP since 10 May, 2023.

This is the second such extension granted by the NCLT.

The tribunal had on November 23 last year granted an extension of 90 days, which ended on 4 February.

The three firms, including budget carrier Spicejet, Sharjah-based Sky One, and African continent-focused firm Safrik Investments, have shown interest in buying Go First.

The Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code (IBC) mandates completion of CIRP within 330 days, which includes the time taken during litigations.

As per Section 12(1) of the Code, CIRP should be completed within 180 days.

However, the maximum time within which CIRP must be mandatorily completed, including any extension or litigation period, is 330 days, failing which the corporate debtor is sent for liquidation.

On 10 May, NCLT admitted the plea of Go First to initiate voluntary insolvency resolution proceedings.

First stopped flying on 3 May. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Tata cuts EV prices by up to Rs 1.2 lakh

NEW DELHI, 13 FEB

Tata Motors on Tuesday said that its electric vehicle arm has reduced prices of two models - Nexon.ev and Tiago.ev - by up to Rs 1.2 lakh on account of reduction in battery cost.

The auto major has cut the price of Nexon.ev by up to Rs 1.2 lakh and now the model price starts at Rs 14.49 lakh.

Similarly, the company has reduced the prices of Tiago.ev by up to Rs 70,000 with the br model now starting at Rs 7.99 lakh, Tata Motors said in a statement.

Introductory prices of the recently launched Punch.ev remain unchanged as they already factor in reduction in battery cost in the foreseeable future, it added.

"Battery costs constitute a substantial part of the overall cost of an EV."

"With battery cell prices having softened in the recent past and considering their potential reduction in the foreseeable future, we have chosen to proactively pass on the resulting benefits directly to customers," Tata Passenger Electric Mobility (TPEM) Chief Commercial Officer Vivek Srivatsa said.

While EVs have grown rapidly over the last few years, the company's mis-

PHOTO: PTI

'India is B'desh's largest export destination'

In FY23 (until February), Indian exports to Bangladesh tallied at USD 10.63 billion *PHOTO: PTI*

DHAKA, 13 FEB

India is today Bangladesh's largest export destination in Asia, the Indian High Commissioner here has said, highlighting the importance of multimodal connectivity in unlocking the true potential of bilateral cooperation between the two countries.

High Commissioner Pranay Verma made these remarks on Monday after Shipping Minister Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury inaugurated the Sultanganj port, establishing naval connectivity between Bangladesh's Rajshahi and India's Murshidabad.

"The future of our partnership lies in efficient multimodal connectivity - encompassing road and rail, inland waterways, and coastal shipping," he said.

This inauguration marks the first of the five trial movements of cargo vessels between Maia Port in India and Sultanganj, Godagari Port of Call in Bangladesh on Indo Bangladesh Protocol (IBP) Route 5 and 6.

There is significant potential for cargo movement through this IBP Route, which is expected to give new impetus to the Inland waterways ecosystem in both countries.

Verma said that the re-opening of the Maia-Sultanganj river route is a step that will benefit the local economies on the two sides of the border as well as also contribute to national economies and strengthen sub-regional cooperation and integration.

Noting that India was today Bangladesh's largest export destination in Asia, the High Commissioner hoped that better connectivity links and new measures like trade in Indian Rupee will further enhance Bangladeshi exports to India.

- India is the second-largest import source for Bangladesh, trailing only behind China. Dhaka's exports to India reached a total of USD 1990 million in 2021 22.

India is the second-largest import source for Bangladesh, trailing only behind China. Dhaka's exports to India reached a total of USD 1990 million in 2021 22, whereas imports from India amounted to a USD 13.69 billion in the same period.

In FY23 (until February), Indian exports to Bangladesh tallied at USD 10.63 billion, equivalent to 2.6 per cent of India's total exports. Conversely, Bangladesh's imports from India during the same period totalled USD 1.86 billion, constituting 0.28 per cent of India's overall imports. *—PTI*

$2T must to triple renewables by 2030

NEW DELHI, 13 FEB

An investment of USD 12 trillion till 2030 is needed to deliver the goal of tripling renewables, as agreed at the UN climate conference in Dubai in December, according to a report released on Tuesday.

The report by global think-tank Climate Analytics said Asia is the only region broadly on course to meet the goal of tripling global renewable energy capacity - driven mostly by policies in China and India.

The region makes the biggest overall contribution, providing around half (47 per cent) of the 8.1 Terawatt of renewable capacity additions needed globally by 2030.

However, the significant coal and gas pipelines in these countries risk stranded assets or slowing the transition. As renewables are set to grow strongly in the region, new fossil fuel plants are not needed and should be avoided, it said.

The growth of renewable energy in China and India compensates for laggards such as South Korea, where it is set to grow at half the rate of the region as a whole.

The report finds that an investment of USD 8 trillion is needed for new renewables and USD 4 trillion for grid and storage infrastructure for tripling global renewable energy capacity to 11 Terawatt or 11,000 Gigawatt. *—PTI*

Musk ordered to testify in SEC's Twitter probe

SAN FRANCISCO, 13 FEB

A judge has ordered Elon Musk to testify for a third time as part of the Securities and Exchange Commission's investigation into his USD 44 billion purchase of Twitter, now called X, in 2022.

Magistrate Judge Laurel Beeler issued an order on Saturday giving Musk, his team and the SEC a week to agree on a date and location for Musk's testimony. In a court hearing last December, Beeler said she would issue an order if the two sides couldn't agree on when and where the Tesla and SpaceX CEO would testify.

Beeler said, however, that the court is enforcing the SEC's subpoena and that the testimony is "not unduly burdensome" for Musk. The SEC had given Musk the option to testify in Texas, where he lives.

Elon Musk *PHOTO: PTI*

The SEC has been conducting a fact-finding investigation into the period before Musk's Twitter takeover, when the San Francisco-based social media company was still publicly traded. The agency said it has not concluded any federal securities laws were violated.

Musk has already testified in the case twice. But since then, according to the judge's order, the SEC has received "thousands of new documents" from various parties, including hundreds of documents from Musk. *—PTI*

MHI INVITES BIDS VIA TENDER FOR CHEMISTRY CELLS

NEW DELHI, 13 FEB

The Ministry of Heavy Industries (MHI) convened a pre-bid meeting at IFCI Limited in New Delhi, paving the way for the second round under the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for Advanced Chemistry Cells (ACC).

According to a press release by the Ministry of Heavy Industries, the meeting, held on Monday, garnered participation from industry stakeholders and government organizations, signaling a concerted effort to propel India's renewable energy revolution. The pre-bid meeting laid the groundwork for the forthcoming global tender, which seeks bids for the establishment of giga-scale Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) manufacturing facilities, cumulatively amounting to 10 GWh capacity. *—PTI*

Tata Steel to now hire transgenders

RANCHI, 13 FEB

Tata Steel has taken a "significant step towards promoting inclusivity" by inviting applications from transgender candidates for various positions across multiple locations, the company said.

As a leading global steel company, Tata Steel recognises the importance of "breaking the glass ceiling and mainstreaming transgender people" in society, it said.

"Transgender candidates with any of the following qualifications can apply: Matriculation in English or ITI or graduation in any discipline or diploma in engineering in any discipline from any institute recognised by AICTE or UGC... or Degree in BE/B Tech in any discipline from any institute, recognised by AICTE or UGC," Tata Steel said in a notification.

The last date for filing applications is 15 February.

In February 2022, the steel giant had expanded its transgender employee base by onboarding 12 crane operator trainees from the LGBTQ+ community at its Kalinganagar plant in Odisha. *—PTI*

'COULD WREAK HAVOC'

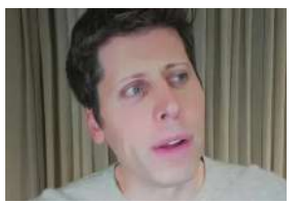
Societal misalignments make AI dangerous: Sam

DUBAI, 13 FEB

The CEO of ChatGPT-maker OpenAI said on Tuesday that the dangers that keep him awake at night regarding artificial intelligence are the "very subtle societal misalignments" that could make the systems wreak havoc.

Sam Altman, speaking at the World Government Summit in Dubai via a video call, reiterated his call for a body like the International Atomic Energy Agency to be created to oversee AI that's likely advancing faster than the world expects.

"There's some things in there that are easy to imagine where things really go wrong. And I'm not that interested in the killer robots walking on the street direction of things going wrong," Altman said. "I'm much more interested in the very subtle societal misalignments where we just have these systems out in society and through no particular ill intention, things just go horribly wrong."



Sam Altman *PHOTO: AP*

However, Altman stressed that the AI industry, like OpenAI, shouldn't be in the driver's seat when it comes to making regulations governing the industry.

OpenAI, a San Francisco-based artificial intelligence startup, is one of the leaders in the field. Microsoft has invested some USD 1 billion in OpenAI. The Associated Press has signed a deal with OpenAI for it to access its news archive. Meanwhile, The New York Times has sued OpenAI and Microsoft over the use of its stories without permission to train OpenAI's chatbots.

OpenAI's success has made Altman the public face for generative AI's rapid commercialisation — and the fears over what may come from the new technology. The UAE, an autocratic federation of seven hereditarily ruled sheikhdoms, has signs of that risk. Speech remains tightly controlled. *—AP*

PHOTO: PTI

Hopefully, Rehan's visa issue will be sorted out: Pope

RAJKOT, 13 FEB

The lack of multiple entry India visa had delayed Rehan Ahmed's exit from the airport after England arrived here for the third Test, but the spinner's teammate Ollie Pope hoped that the issue would be resolved ahead of the match, beginning on Thursday.England had flown to Abu Dhabi on an extended 10-day break after the second Test at Visakhapatnam but on the team's return on Monday, Ahmed was stopped from leaving the Hirasar airport here because he had only a single-entry visa.The local immigration authorities managed to give the 19-year-old an interim two-day visa to facilitate his entry.—*PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Alcaraz puts Paris Olympic gold above French Open title

WANGELS, 14 FEB

Carlos Alcaraz said on Monday if he had to choose between an Olympic gold at the 2024 Paris Olympics or the French Open title he would go for the gold. The 20-year-old who won the US Open in 2022 and Wimbledon in 2023 was asked about his season goals ahead of the Argentina Open in Buenos Aires where he is defending champion. "If I had to choose one target this year I'd choose the Olympic gold over Roland-Garros," the Spaniard said.

The French Open will be played from 20 May to 9 June with the Olympic tennis at the same Roland Garros venue from 27 July to 4 August.—*AP*

PHOTO: PTI

Saurabh Tiwary to retire from professional cricket

NEW DELHI, 13 FEB

Left-handed batter Saurabh Tiwary on Monday decided to retire from professional cricket after Jharkhand's final league match of the Ranji Trophy against Rajasthan in Jamshedpur on 16 February.In a career spanning 17 years, Tiwary captained Jharkhand, played three ODIs for India, and turned up for four IPL (Indian Premier League) franchises.Announcing his retirement from all formats of the game following the Ranji Trophy match versus Rajasthan, the 34-year-old Tiwary said it was appropriate time for him to decide as he wanted to give space for the youngsters even though he still has cricket left in him.—*PTI*

Rachna Kumari banned for 12 years for doping

NEW DELHI, 13 FEB

Indian hammer thrower Rachna Kumari was on Tuesday handed a12-year ban for failing multiple dope tests by the international federation'sAthletics Integrity Unit (AIU). The30-year-old Kumari's dope sample, taken out-of-competition, was found tocontain steroids Stanozolol, Metandienone,DHCMT, Clenbuterol). DQ results from 24 September 2023," the AIU posted onX. Theathlete's results have been disqualified since September 24, 2023. Thisincludes losing any titles, awards, medals, points, prizes, and appearancemoney.—*PTI*

It's not that you won't see rank turners: Kuldeep Yadav

A depleted India was pushed by an aggressive England

RAJKOT, 13 FEB

India spinner Kuldeep Yadav on Tuesday said that rank turners might come into play in the ongoing Test battle against England but admitted that sporting tracks, like the ones seen in the first two games, are "good for cricket".

The two sides have assembled here for the third Test starting at the Saurashtra Cricket Association (SCA) Stadium on Thursday, with the series poised at 1-1.

"Overall, everything is important. The fast bowlers also come into play, like you saw in the last match. So (good wickets) are good for cricket.

It is not (the case) that you will not get to see rank-turners going forward. Hopefully, in the future you will see (turning tracks)," Kuldeep said while addressing a media conference ahead of India's training session on Tuesday.

A depleted India was pushed by an aggressive England, who beat them comfortably in the first Test, but the hosts bounced back in the second. Both the matches were played on pitches that were not predominantly spin-friendly and had something for everyone.

"I have no idea. I haven't played on rank turners. I did not play in the last series (Border-Gavaskar series in February-March last year) at home," he replied when asked why there were no rank turners for the first two Tests.

"I do not know what our approach or thinking would be. It is the team management's decision. All of you also want to watch good cricket. For good cricket, it's important (that the wickets are good)," he said.

India spinner Kuldeep Yadav PHOTO: PTI

England's approach unusual for Test cricket

Kuldeep admitted that England's aggressive approach with the bat has been unusual to deal with in Test cricket.

"...in Test cricket, you are not used to having someone with such an attacking batting approach. But at the same time, you are more involved in the game. As a spinner you are more focused on the game, how you are going to bowl, and what your approach will be," he said.

"Sometimes in Test cricket, you are not overly worried if the batter would attack much and you focus on how to dismiss them.

"But here the approach is different, they are in attacking mode so you have to plan on how to restrict them because (if they are) playing more shots, then more opportunities are being created to take a wicket," he added.

Opportunity for youngsters

India has been depleted further with KL Rahul set to miss the third Test, but Kuldeep said it is an opportunity for young players in the side to prove their mettle."...that gives a chance to a newcomer who can get the opportunity.

I am sure they have done well in domestic cricket and it is their time to show what they have got.

—*PTI*

Sarfaraz trains hard, likely to make debut

RAJKOT, 13 FEB

Wicketkeeper-batter Dhruv Jurel and middle-order bat Sarfaraz Khan are likely to make their Test debut in the third Test against England at Rajkot. Dhruv Jurel was seen doing wicket-keeping drills in the first practice session ahead of the third Test along with Sarfaraz Khan in the first slip.

—*PTI*

India's oldest Test cricketer Dattajirao Gaekwad dies

NEW DELHI, 13 FEB

Dattajirao Gaekwad PHOTO: X

India's oldest Test cricketer and former captain Dattajirao Gaekwad died on Tuesday due to age-related ailments.

Gaekwad, who was the father of former India opener and national coach Aunshuman Gaekwad, was 95.

He breathed his last early this morning after battling for life in the ICU of a Baroda hospital for the past 12 days, a source in the family told PTI.

He played 11 Tests for India between 1952 and 1961, captaining the national team in 1959 when it toured England.

The right-hander made his debut against England at Leeds in 1952 and his final international game was against Pakistan in Chennai in 1961.

In the Ranji Trophy, Gaekwad represented Baroda from 1947 to 1961. He scored 3139 runs at an average of 47.56, including 14 hundreds.

His highest was a 249 not out against Maharashtra in the 1959-60 season.

He became India's oldest living Test cricketer in 2016 after the death of former batter Deepak Shodhan at the age of 87 in Ahmedabad. —*PTI*

Rachin Ravindra picked three scalps on the first day of the second Test against South Africa PHOTO: ANI

Ravindra takes 3 wickets, SA reaches 220 for 6 at stumps

HAMILTON, 13 FEB

Rachin Ravindra took three wickets and slammed the brakes on South Africa's scoring to give New Zealand a slight edge Tuesday on the first day of the second cricket test.

Ravindra claimed the key middle-order wickets of Zubayr Hamza, Keegan Petersen, and David Bedingham and bowled 21 overs at a cost of only 33 runs to swing the day just in New Zealand's favor.

New Zealand faced an unexpected obstacle late in the day when Ruan de Swardt posted his maiden half-century and the burly allrounder Shaun von Berg, making his test debut at 37, shared an unbroken partnership of 70 for the seventh wicket.

De Swardt was 55 not out and von Berg was unbeaten on 34 as South Africa reached 220-6 at stumps.

On a day of unusual decisions, New Zealand left out regular spinner Mitchell Santner, who took six wickets in the first test, included four-seamers, and ended up leaning heavily on Ravindra's left-arm spin.

South Africa captain Neil Brand also made the unexpected decision to bat on winning the toss, becoming only the second captain in the last 11 tests at Seddon Park to do so. The pitch appeared green at first and there was some help early for the seamers as Matt Henry, Will O'Rourke and Neil Wagner shared wickets in the first session. South Africa was 64-3 at lunch.

O'Rourke, who claimed his first test wicket, said: "It was pretty challenging, probably a little bit slower than what we were expecting."Ravindra came into his own after lunch when he helped New Zealand slow South Africa's scoring rate. He bowled his first 13 overs, including six maidens, at a cost of only 15 runs. When he left the attack at the approach of the second new ball, he had taken 3-33 from 20 overs. He came back to bowl the last over of the day. —*AP*

Mayank Agarwal PHOTO: PTI

Mayank to lead Karnataka

BENGALURU, 13 FEB

Experienced opener Mayank Agarwal will lead Karnataka in their final Elite Group C Ranji Trophy match against Chandigarh in Hubli, beginning from Friday.

The former champions are currently leading Group C with 24 points and they just require to take the first-innings lead against Chandigarh to progress to the knockouts.Tamil Nadu is the second-placed team in this group with 22 points. Chandigarh is seventh with five points from six matches.

However, Karnataka will not have the services of in-form Devdutt Padikkal as the left-hander has been drafted into the India Test squad for the Tests against England in place of still-recuperating KL Rahul.

India under-19 star Dheeraj Gowda has been drafted into the 15-man squad. Gowda was part of the India side that finished runners-up to Australia in the ICC Under-19 World Cup in South Africa recently.

Karnataka squad: Mayank Agarwal (captain), Nikin Jose (vice-captain), Ravi kumar, Manish Pandey, Sharath Srinivas (wk), KV Aneesh, Vasuki Koushik, Vysakh Vijayakumar, Kishan Bedare, Hardik Raj, Vidwath. —*PTI*

Mandhana jumps two places to world No. 4 in ICC rankings

DUBAI, 13 FEB

India opener Smriti Mandhana has jumped two spots to grab the fourth position in the latest ICC Women's ODI Player Rankings for batters.

The 27-year-old from Mumbai surpassed South Africa's Laura Wolvaardt, who slumped to fifth place after a lackluster show in the ODI series against Australia.

England's Nat Sciver Brunt, Sri Lanka's Chamari Athapaththu, and Australia's Beth Mooney occupy the top 3 positions in the batting chart, which also has India skipper Harmanpreet Kaur static at the 10th place. Mandhana, who is set to represent the Royal Challengers Bangalore in the Women's Premier League, last played ODIs in the bilateral series against Australia. —*AP*

Smriti Mandhana PHOTO: PTI

England's Ollie Pope addresses a press conference ahead of the third Test match between India and England, at Saurashtra Cricket Association Stadium, in Rajkot on Tuesday PHOTO: PTI

Arjun Prasad fires 62 for opening-round honors

KOLKATA, 13 FEB

Delhi-based Arjun Prasad fired an exceptional eight-under 62 to take the opening round honors at the Rs 1 crore PGTI Players Championship here on Tuesday.Defending champion Sachin Baisoya (63), another Delhi golfer, was a shot behind in second place.The four players bunched in third place with scores of 64 included rookie Stepan Danek of the Czech Republic as well as Udayan Mane, Karan Pratap Singh, and the city's Mohammad Sanju.Arjun Prasad, who turned 25 on Monday, made sure he celebrated his birthday in style with a sizzling round of golf that featured two eagles, five birdies, and a bogey.Prasad, who endured a tough season in 2023 due to a wrist injury, picked up four birdies on the front nine after leaving himself a few short birdie putts. —*PTI*

3-4 Ranji games mandatory for IPL participation: BCCI

MUMBAI, 13 FEB

Jharkhand keeper-batter Ishan Kishan's reluctance to play first-class cricket and focus only on the IPL could prompt the BCCI to make a minimum number of Ranji Trophy games mandatory for players to be eligible for the cash-rich league's lucrative auction pool.

It has been learned that BCCI brass has already instructed Kishan to play Jharkhand's last group league game against Rajasthan in Jamshedpur, starting 16 February.

How Kishan had skipped match after match after returning midway from the South Africa tour citing "travel fatigue" hasn't exactly gone down well with men who matter in the Indian cricket establishment.

More so after it was found that he is training in Baroda with his new MI skipper Hardik Pandya while his state team is languishing near the bottom of the group A table.

There is a consensus that a strict policy needs to be adhered to so that a group of young players doesn't make "playing IPL to IPL" a habit.

"The decision-makers in BCCI are well aware that some players don't want to play any red ball cricket. If they are out of the Indian team, they would at best play a few Mushtaq Ali T20 games and then not report for state team duty during red ball season," a senior BCCI official told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

"To rein in such players, the board in all likelihood will make it mandatory to play 3-4 Ranji Trophy games, failing which, they can't play IPL or even appear in IPL auction if released by their franchise.

"The state units feel unless the diktat comes from the top of BCCI, some of the young stars will treat Ranji Trophy with disdain." —*PTI*

Ishan Kishan PHOTO: PTI

ISHAN KISHAN FIASCO

West Indies end Australia's tour with a dominating win

PERTH, 13 FEB

Andre Russell and Sherfane Rutherford smashed half-centuries in a record-breaking sixth-wicket stand to propel the West Indies to a 37-run consolation win over Australia in the third and final Twenty20 match on Tuesday.

Russell destroyed the pace and spin of Adam Zampa late in the innings to score 71 off just 29 balls while Rutherford contributed 67 off 40 deliveries as West Indies posted 220-6 after winning the toss and electing to bat.

David Warner briefly kept Australia in the hunt for a 3-0 sweep in the series with 81 off 49 balls before the home team faltered against offspinner Roston Chase and was restricted to 183-5.Chase, one of the two changes West Indies made for the final game, derailed Australia's pursuit with the wickets of Warner and Josh Inglis in one over to end up with 2-19.

"It's a very good feeling to come here and get a win," West Indies captain Rowman Powell said after losing the series 2-1. "The boys showed some heart and courage. —*AP*

Andre Russell and Sherfane Rutherford PHOTO: ANI

UWW LIFTS SUSPENSION

Asks WFI not to discriminate against protesting wrestlers

NEW DELHI, 13 FEB

Wrestling's world governing body on Tuesday lifted theprovisional suspension on India but directed the national federation to providewritten guarantees that there would be no discriminatory action against theprotesting trio of Bajrang Punia, Vinesh Phogat and Sakshi Malik.

The suspension was imposed by United World Wrestling (UWW) on August 23 last yearafter the national federation failed to hold elections in time.

"TheUWW Bureau met on February 9 to review the suspension among other topics andconsidering all the elements and information, it decided to lift thesuspension," the world body said in a statement.

"TheWFI has to immediately provide UWW with written guarantees that all wrestlerswill be considered for participation without any discrimination in all WFIevents, in particular trials for the Olympic Games and any other major nationaland international events.

"Thisnon-discrimination includes the three athletes who protested against allegedwrongdoings by the former President (Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh)," itasserted.

Inthe WFI elections held in December last year Sanjay Singh, a close aide of theformer President, was elected the new head. Thefederation, however, was suspended within days of taking charge by the sportsministry which cited violation of the national sports code as the reason. On Tuesday, it welcomed the UWW's decision. "Thead-hoc committee holds no significance now as we have got UWW recognition.Since this is an Olympic year, we will be holding the trials soon and I amcommitted to ensure that none of the wrestlers' future is jeopardized,"Sanjay Singh told PTI while responding to the development. AnotherWFI source said that there would be no discrimination and Singh would soon bewriting to the protesting trio to seek reconciliation. —*PTI*

Indian wrestlers during a protest PHOTO: X

- Wrestling's world governing body on Tuesday lifted theprovisional suspension on India but directed the national federation to providewritten guarantees that there would be no discriminatory action against theprotesting trio of Bajrang Punia, Vinesh Phogat and Sakshi Malik.

Chelsea late show deepens Crystal crisis

LONDON, 13 FEB

Conor Gallagher struck twice to condemn his former club Crystal Palace to a damaging 3-1 defeat on Monday and keep Chelsea in the hunt for European football next season. The injury-ravaged Eagles were on course for a huge win in their battle to remain in the Premier League when Jefferson Lerma's long-range strike opened the scoring. But Palace have won just three times in 19 games and were undone late on after Gallagher equalized within two minutes of the second half.

Gallagher fired home his second of the night and Enzo Fernandez added the third in stoppage time to lift Chelsea to 10th and within two points of seventh.

The defeat leaves Palace still just five points above the relegation zone in 15th.

"It was extremely cruel but the game is about goals and unfortunately we made mistakes which led to goals," said underfire Palace boss Roy Hodgson. —*AP*

Conor Gallagher PHOTO: AFP